

**CREATING THE MISSION STATEMENT
IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS:
A CASE STUDY**

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The One-Course Credit Project Option -- Proposal

Introduction:

Educating students in Alberta in the 1990's is a difficult task. There have been many adjustments to public schooling -- the shift toward site-based management, the tightening of educational resources and increased involvement and increased accountability for a variety of stakeholder groups, to mention a few. It is becoming a monumental task for schools, teachers, students, and parents to work in harmony, or at the very least, to see themselves working in harmony toward the same outcomes. The focus of this writing will be an attempt to describe a process of creating harmony through the development of a Statement of School Mission and School Values.

Purpose of this Project:

The purpose of this project will be four-fold:

1. To examine selected research and information pertinent to the development of a Statement of School Mission and School Values.
2. To present an in-depth, step-by-step analysis and description of a mature school's attempt to re-develop a Statement of School Mission and School Values.
3. To describe briefly the evolution of a new school's attempt to develop a Statement of School Mission and School Values.

4. To reflect upon the two very different situations in which a Statement of School Mission and School Values were developed.

Rationale for the Project:

As alluded to in the introduction, the ideal of having all stakeholders in a school setting working toward the same goals and objectives is becoming more difficult. The very fact that teachers themselves, within the same building, have different visions for the direction and course a school should take only underlines the much greater task of trying to get all interest groups -- parents, students, teachers, and the community -- working toward a common understanding and focus for a particular school. With changes taking place in all aspects of public education, the report on this project should inform other educators, especially those whose schools undertake similar ventures.

There are four main components to this project, each with its own important role in the overall purpose and development of this writing:

The initial section, where the work of some key authors in the development of Statements of School Mission and School Values will be considered, should provide the reader with a general base of knowledge from which to draw conclusions and make relevant speculations for their own schools. As well, it should provide a detailed reference for further understanding of the specific case studies which will be presented.

This project is by no means intended to be an all encompassing source or a "how-to guide" for the development of Mission Statements and School Values. However, the second and third sections will be detailed to allow the reader to gain two very different perspectives on the events that transpired. The Alexandra Case Study focuses on a process used in a mature school, with a seasoned staff, and strong school traditions. The Eagle Butte Case Study is unique in that this is a school in its first year of operation, with no specific traditions carved into the functioning of the school, nor a staff with a specific process for working together collectively.

In understanding these very different methods in the development of Mission Statements, other readers should be able to pick and choose specific aspects from each study that they might consider and apply in their own schools. All schools have different "cultures" which may become apparent only as the development of a Mission Statement begins to unfold. From the two extremes offered in this writing, readers might be able to predict some of the strengths and weaknesses that will become relevant influences in the building of their own school missions.

Finally, the last section of this project will focus on this writer's personal conclusions and speculations on the development of Statements of School Mission and School Values. Because of the very different natures of the two schools encountered in this project, I hope the conclusions will serve as guide markers toward successes and away from pitfalls for other schools that initiate similar activities.

Conclusion:

The final product for this project will be a written document describing Statements of School Mission and School Values from a research base, two specific case studies, and a personal reflection upon the activities that led to the development of such Mission Statements and School Values.

Mission Statements -- A Research Base:

The education of our youth is a task that requires many partners. In a recent Parent Council meeting, a high school student made the most down to earth, yet, profound statement that I have heard in a long time. He said, "It takes a whole village to raise a child." This simple phrase has stuck with me in part because it came from the student himself but, more importantly, because of the wisdom that it holds. The development of a mission statement and a vision for a school is a task that tries to engage "the whole village" to educate children in a cooperative, united manner.

By definition, "A mission is the shared vision of the people in an organization about what their ultimate purpose really is" (Arth, et al, 1987, p. 2). Rogus (1990) writes:

"A mission statement is simply a statement of an organization's vision of itself that serves to guide program planning, development, and evaluation. The mission statement also serves as the basis for communicating within and outside the organization with those who are important to the school's effectiveness and success" (p. 6).

Steven Covey (1996) stresses the importance of beginning with the end in mind:

"The most effective way I know to begin with the end in mind is to develop a personal mission statement or philosophy or creed. It focuses on what you want to

be (character) and to do (contributions and achievements) and on the values or principles upon which being and doing are based. Mission statements are essential to the development of effective families and organizations."

Arth (1987) suggests there are four elements common to all missions:

1. A Statement of Purpose
2. An Indication of Uniqueness
3. An Explicit Statement of Commitment
4. A Clear Value Position

Although each part of the mission, in and of itself, is powerful, it is the collective nature of the statement that presents the guiding influence and focused perspective for the school. "Write a mission statement so that it is timeless... as you mature it may evolve and change as your consciousness and awareness grow. But you write it as if it will never change" (Covey, 1996).

"The vision and mission of the school must reflect the hopes and dreams, the needs and interests, the values and beliefs of everyone that has a stake in the school" (Sergiovanni, 1990, p. 57.) Students, parents, and staff must all be included in the process of developing the statements that will define what the purpose is for the school. "The most effective approach to developing ownership of a mission statement is to involve in the planning process those persons likely to be affected by its implementation" (Rogus, p. 8).

Covey (1996) echoes Rogus when he states, "Everyone should be involved in the process. The process is as important as the content. And once they're [mission statements] developed, they should be used like a constitution, as the supreme law of the land by which all decisions are made."

Sergiovanni (1990) writes:

The development of a vision should not be construed as a strategic plan that functions as a "road map" charting the turns needed to reach a specific reality that the leader has in mind. It should instead, be viewed more as a compass that points the direction to be taken, that inspires enthusiasm and that allows people to buy into and take part in the shaping of the way that will constitute the school's mission. The building of a consensus about purposes and beliefs creates a powerful force that bonds people together around common themes, on the one hand, and that provides them with a sense of what is important and some signal of what is of value, on the other (p.57).

"Schools that lack a clear sense of mission are characterized by aimlessness and high levels of dissonance. There is little harmony among staff members or between staff members and students. Discipline problems are more likely to occur because staff members lack a common set of expectations, and students have a poor sense of what the purpose of school really is. Students become confused in such an environment, and parents and community members often become

frustrated with what they consider to be the inconsistent performance of the school" (Arth, p. 4-5).

In a similar vein, Johnston (1987) states, with reference to missions and schools:

Regardless of how influential values [mission statements] can be, they will be absolutely useless unless they are widely shared and believed by everyone in the school. Without consensus on values [missions], the school will be aimless for teachers, confusing for students, and will send contradictory messages to its community (p. 82).

"Schools with a clear understanding of their unique missions are more effective than schools that lack a sense of mission... the development of a mission statement is one of the single most important things principals can do to influence the quality of education and the quality of life in their schools" (Arth, p. 2).

"The importance of an institutional mission statement is generally accepted; however, there is little information on the process an organization or institution might employ to develop one" (McDonough & Noonan, 1994, p. 10). It is on this basis, for the sake of other schools learning from similar ventures, that this project was created and its results disseminated. If one truly believes in the crucial nature of a mission statement for a school, then the process for the development of such a statement should be monumental as well.

Mission Development - Alexandra Junior High School

Medicine Hat Public School District No. 76

Medicine Hat, Alberta

Preamble:

The purpose of this section is to present one school's attempt to begin a school improvement process through the development of a Mission Statement, the re-defining of School Values, and the production of a school slogan.

The stages, as well as the results of this initiative, will be shared and described in as much detail as possible. The nature of the activities as well as the benefits and difficulties at various points throughout the process will be discussed. Although a NEW Mission Statement, a NEW set of School values, and a NEW School Slogan were produced, I feel it is the process itself that needs to be most fully described and clearly understood.

I hope that the lessons learned through trial-and-error in this school improvement process will be of some benefit to the staffs of other schools. By no means are the events described in this report the definitive answers for school improvement, but this will be one very realistic case from which other educators may gain some insights and wisdom for such endeavours in their own schools.

Building a Mission -- A Process:

During the 1993-1994 school year a follow-up evaluation report, considering the recommendations from a previous evaluation completed five years earlier, was given to Alexandra Junior High School (AJHS). In this follow-up report, Alexandra was considered to be a building functioning as a strong school unit. Success was being achieved and recognized by parents, students, and teachers who were taking an active role in the day-to-day workings of this junior high school. It was on the basis of this positive follow-up evaluation that some staff members raised concerns for the future of the building and the education it was to provide.

One teacher took it upon herself to reach out to all staff members, by having them describe their feelings, frustrations and desires for their future at AJHS. Although the staff had just come through a very positive evaluation, there was still a sense of helplessness and loss of morale felt by some teachers so the chance to "vent" was offered to all. The findings were shared at an open meeting for all staff members of Alexandra Junior High School in the form of the following summary:

STAFF WELLNESS AT A.J.H.S.

The teachers at AJHS are a rare breed. We are an incredibly resilient group of people who care a great deal about each other and about the students that we teach. This has perhaps been our greatest strength over a number of years.

We, the teachers at AJHS, have proven time and time again that we are a dedicated group of professionals. Evidence of this can be seen in the parent questionnaire that was completed which indicated that 92% of the parents are pleased with the educational experience of their children at AJHS. As well, we succeed in meeting individual student needs by providing quality education, a caring environment, and extra-curricular activities.

However, we have come to a point at this school where we are feeling the burden of the following:

1. Dealing with 12-14 year olds on a daily basis in a facility that accentuates the problems of this age group.
2. Coping continuously with high stress levels.
3. Dealing with continuous discipline problems.

4. Insufficient preparation time to develop ourselves professionally, and thus provide the needed changes in our lessons.

As a result of these problems and with the added stress of government changes in education, we are facing serious morale problems at AJHS. Although there is great concern for the direction of education and for the students that we teach, it is equally important to direct our concern to ourselves, the care givers.

Our administration has tried to alleviate some of the problems facing teachers by doing such things as changing the timetable, and adding a "consequence room". This has been greatly appreciated and has helped a little as teachers try to cope with the unique situation at AJHS.

However, the problems of our situation at AJHS remain largely unchanged and have resulted in mounting concerns about our stress level, feelings of burnout, and a high percentage of staff members needing sick days. Along with this we are feeling frustration over the increasing number of discipline problems, high class numbers, and the notorious fast pace at this school. It is the unanimous feeling of the staff that more preparation time should be available to us, and a conscious effort should be made to make the environment at AJHS more hospitable for the staff.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO MAKE AJHS A BETTER PLACE?

We feel that we are limited in the number of alternatives that are available to enable the staff at AJHS to have a better working environment. However, there are some options that we can explore together. These options have been gathered in discussion with the entire staff at AJHS.

1. A new schedule would enable teachers to get more preparation time (as Crescent Heights High has done, and Medicine Hat High School is currently exploring).
2. If a time tabling change is not possible, then we should hire two additional staff to enable us to have at least four preparation periods in a thirty-six period , six-day cycle.
3. Balance class sizes
4. Start school earlier to get early dismissal one day a week.
5. Establish a consistent discipline policy that specifies results of violations, both in the classroom and out in the hallways (to be published in the student handbook).
6. Split the noon hour.

7. Get rid of unnecessary extras that burden teachers, eg. adviser/advisee program.
Focus on exactly why we are here...to TEACH children!
8. Add minutes to teachers' schedules so that there is a total of 51 minutes over the minimum 1400 minutes of instructional time needed per week (currently we teach 1445 minutes per week). Then an extra period (51 minutes) could be taken off as a preparation period.
9. Create more staff equity in the assignments to Consequence Room.
10. Tighten lunchroom discipline.
11. Monitor snack time more closely, as it is used as a lunchtime by many students.
12. Staff the Consequence Room with teachers, not aides.
13. Create an isolation room to be used for repeat offenders, similar to the one operating at MHHS.
14. Open the Campus
15. Avoid the sale of junk food, especially at the canteen before school.

16. Give students with "out of school" suspensions work that must be completed before re-entry into school. Also, before students are allowed back into school, they must be brought back with a parent and consequences of misbehaviour must be clearly laid out for both the student and the parent. The consequences **MUST** be thoroughly followed.
17. Improve communication between staff and administration. The staff needs to feel comfortable discussing problems and opinions with administration.
18. Start school earlier by having the rural students sent to CHHS. This would be a loss of approximately 50 students. This loss of numbers would not mean loss of teachers as we are losing the equivalent of 2 teachers through personal leaves and retirement.
19. Examine Year Round School
20. Involve parents more. There is much volunteer help at Elementary Level; why not at Jr. High? Eg. Parents could supervise lunchroom and hallways so teachers can get a break at noon. Parents could be involved in extra curricular, such as sports. Parents could be involved in organizing noon hour activities. More parents could come in to share their areas of expertise and act as volunteers for special projects in classrooms. We need to encourage the parent council to get really active.

21. Give out of school suspensions after a set number of exclusions, for repeat offenders in the Consequence Room..

As a staff, we understand very well the difficult times that educators face. However, we feel that as a group, we are valuable assets to this school and need to address the ongoing problems which we face on a day to day basis. We strongly feel that even in these difficult times, AJHS can be a haven; a work place that is enjoyable, exciting, and productive for all our staff. By working together as a unit, the teachers, the students, the support staff, and the administration, CAN create a positive working environment for everyone.

Upon completion of the above presentation, there was a momentary pause amongst the group and then some open discussion began. In his summary of the dialogue that took place, the Principal of Alexandra Junior High School stated that much of what had been said was very thought provoking and worthy of further consideration. He was especially moved by the statement from one of the teachers who said the presentation sounded like a "cry for help" from the staff. It was upon these words that another meeting was planned to consider what was needed to help AJHS forge ahead and maintain its strong presence in the education community. A WELLNESS Committee was struck to initiate and continue the development of this new direction for AJHS.

At the next meeting, October 4, 1994, a staff member provided some ideas on how to improve discipline in the building. His presentation included the following suggestions:

INFRACTION SLIPS for misbehaviour throughout the school

- 2 tickets Detention
- 3 tickets - Garbage pick-up
- 4 tickets - Saturday Schooling and ineligibility for campus activities
(dances, teams, etc.)
- 5 tickets - In School Suspension
- 6 tickets - Out of School Suspension

after two months with no infractions, students will have one slip removed from their records. Students with only one infraction slip during the reporting period will start with zero for

the next reporting period, with the infraction slip being discarded.

RULES POSTED IN EVERY CLASSROOM

- standard set of 5-10 school rules posted in every classroom

MOTIVOC PROGRAM

- students do such things as run the vending machines, clean the yard, and build things for the school

PARENT CONVENTION

work shops put on by teachers, for parents, concerning the school. Examples include: Curriculum Overview, Discipline at our School, Learning Styles, Helping with Homework and Establishing Study Skills

CONSEQUENCE ROOM

First Referral - parent is contacted by consequence room teacher who has a phone in the room

- Second Referral - parent is contacted again - student signs a Behaviour Agreement

Third Referral conference with administration with the following discipline actions: In School Suspension (ISS) or Full Suspension or Saturday Schooling.

- Note: Students sent to the consequence room by two different teachers in the same day will be sent home.

At this point in the presentation, the members in attendance took a close look at the information gathered from staff as to their impressions of "what could be done to make AJHS a better place".

At the end of the presentation, although many teachers thought it very informative and thought provoking, they also felt that any or all of the suggestions would only be a band-aid type of approach toward school improvement. Even though discipline seemed (from the initial presentation) to be a big concern amongst staff, it was apparent it could not address all of the anguish and re-building needed to keep AJHS a strong educational organization. It was felt that for the staff there needed to be a common beginning point, something much further back in the process of school improvement than the ideas presented in this meeting. The consensus from those staff members in attendance was that the staff should look again at trying to establish an overall focus for the school.

The following item was then placed on the staff meeting agenda for October, 1994:

Wellness Committee: In order to address concerns about student behaviour and school climate, the wellness committee is recommending that we start a process of identifying the important values of our school, develop a mission statement, develop a core set of rules or expectations, and develop a common set of consequences for non-compliance with our expectations. Various members of the Wellness Committee will provide input to this process.

The following is a summary of the presentation made by the Wellness Committee at the October Staff Meeting:

WELLNESS COMMITTEE - Staff Meeting Presentation

Past:

Last year, AJHS was given a follow-up evaluation, which seemed to indicate many things were being done well. However, we as a staff could feel that the fibres holding us together were beginning to stretch and separate to the point where the pressures of everyday life at AJHS were starting to have a negative impact on many of the things that made the school such a dynamic and successful place.

As a result, Shelly Ennis [an experienced Social Studies teacher] undertook the task of collecting, from each and every staff member, suggestions as to what could be done to maintain AJHS as the strong, successful school that it was rightly perceived to be in the evaluation.

From this information, **five main areas** were indicated as needing immediate attention:

1. Discipline/Discipline Policy
2. Structure /Master Schedule
3. Environment (School Climate)
4. Problem Students (Educational planning for the "atypical" student)
5. Team Development

Action:

The Wellness Committee (with its numbers growing every meeting) took this information and began discussing WHERE TO BEGIN this difficult but important task. From our discussions we, as a committee, felt that instead of trying to develop solutions for the variety of immediate and unforeseen problems at AJHS (a "band-aid" strategy), it would be a greater step forward to take a step back and build a more lasting set of guidelines or values from which we could then begin to deal with the five main areas mentioned above.

The committee thought we should initiate our school improvement process with a look at what we really stood for at AJHS. Since we were a unique 2-grade school with a special clientele, our school improvement process should reflect that.

As a result of the committee's deliberations, the following general ideas were brought forward to the staff as a whole:

- A. Create a new mission statement... but more importantly...
- B. Develop a core set of values pinned to our mission statement that will reflect and effect desired goals and outcomes on a day to day basis for all stakeholders at AJHS - Teachers, Students and Parents.
- C. Based on these core set of values, collectively begin to re-define what we do at AJHS and how it can best be achieved.

Following the presentation and the subsequent discussion, the staff gave their approval for the work of the Wellness Committee to continue.

STAFF UPDATE - Re: WELLNESS COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

(This bulletin was sent to all staff on October 26, 1994)

Oct. 19, 1994 - the staff gave approval for the Wellness Committee to begin a process of redefining a mission statement unique for AJHS and establishing a set of core values which will help guide future growth in our school.

Since this approval was given, the Wellness Committee has done the following things:

1. *Thursday, October 20, 1994* members of the Wellness Committee gave a presentation to the Parent Council. The purpose of this presentation was to inform parents of staff intentions and get their approval for the process as well as their cooperation to participate in the process.

The parent council seemed to be very supportive of this initiative and willing to be a partner in such an endeavour.

2. *Monday, October 24, 1994* - members of the Wellness Committee invited CHHS staff members to share the strategies they use in getting teachers, parents and students involved in their "school improvement" process.

A "Cooperative Processing Model" allows for the participation of as many parties as possible at Crescent Heights High School -- information about this model was presented in more detail at this time.

3. *Tuesday, October 25, 1994* - members of the Wellness Committee met to discuss the "Cooperative Model" presented by CHHS and to establish a next step.

Three things came out of this meeting:

- (i) The "Wellness Committee" title will be changed to the **VISION GROUP**. This title change is to send a message to all staff that **this is NOT an exclusion committee for a few chosen members.**

The title change comes out of the fact that our process in developing a mission statement and values for the school leads us to reflect on a **VISION** for the future of AJHS -- establishing **VALUES**, a **MISSION STATEMENT**, and **GENERAL EXPECTATIONS** based on this collective vision.

- (ii) The Vision Group is concerned that some staff members may have misconceptions about the role and the work of the group. To facilitate greater openness and participation a white board is going to be placed in the staff room as a place for publishing updates on the group's activities and for recording questions and concerns.

ALL STAFF MEMBERS are invited to attend each and every time the Vision Group plans to **get together**. In fact, the more staff members that do attend, the easier the entire process will become. Moreover, the nature of a vision, of a mission statement, of core values and of general expectations for AJHS, are such that **those staff members who can lend DIRECT support over the LONG TERM** are greatly desired.

- (iii) A time for the next session was discussed. Two alternatives were proposed:
- a. Use a staff meeting schedule on Wednesday, Nov. 2, 1994, (a non staff meeting day) to have all staff members meet and begin brainstorming on a "VISION" for AJHS. This is pending approval by Dr. Storlien.

-----OR-----

- b. Meet after school on Tuesday, Nov. 8, 1994, with all staff members, if possible, to brainstorm on a "VISION" for AJHS.

Parents and students will have a similar brainstorming opportunity as well.

The VISION GROUP cannot stress enough, the need for long term staff participation in ALL aspects of this process. The time, commitment and effort by staff, parents and students will lead to a new AJHS, more able to meet our present concerns as well as our future demands.

A further update was sent out on October 27, 1994, to inform staff members of our Superintendent's support for the School Improvement Process as well as the plan of attack for the next Vision Group Meeting:

VISION GROUP COMMUNIQUE

October 26, 1994 - Dr. Giduk [Principal] contacted Dr. Storlien [Superintendent] to inform him of our Vision process and to request approval for running a staff meeting schedule November 2, 1994 -- on a non staff meeting day.

Dr. Storlien is in full support of our process to discuss a vision, to develop a mission statement and to establish core values unique to AJHS. However, he could not give approval to the staff meeting schedule until all staff have been consulted (not just staff present at a Vision Group meeting) and have given their approval for the time change. As well, he needs parent approval through the parent council.

Dr. Storlien did suggest that AJHS discuss taking a half day, in the future, as our process begins to unfold. In response, some time will be set aside at our next staff meeting under **ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION AND ACTION** to consider this suggestion. Parent council will also be informed. Pending staff and parent approval, setting aside half days may be of help in the near future.

Conclusion:

PLAN (b) - TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 1994 -- AN AFTER SCHOOL SESSION -- will go into action.

More information as to the exact agenda and process for this meeting will be forth coming.

THE VISION GROUP STRONGLY URGES ALL STAFF TO TRY TO ATTEND TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 1994 -- *This is when the development begins.*

On November 2, 1994, the following Agenda for the November 8, 1994, meeting was provided to all staff members:

November 2, 1994

Vision Group: Agenda

Speaker's Corner: Tuesday, Nov. 8, 1994 3:00 - 4:00 pm

1. Show video "Power of Vision" (3:00 - 3:30 pm)

- snacks provided

2. Break into groups and leaders will (3:30 - 3:50 pm)

pose the question:

"What kind of school would you like to work in?"

Using the Cooperative Process, all group members will share their ideas/feelings on the above question. (See reverse for group members)

3. Return to Speaker's Corner to recap (3:50 - 3:59 pm)

and collect information from all groups.

VISION GROUPS FOR NOVEMBER 8, 1994

GROUP A:

1. Dick Brooks
2. Sandra Craven
3. Curtis Tye
4. Robin Hofmann
5. Brian Snowden
6. Mary Jean Furman
7. Sharon Hammel
8. Lorine Satre
- 9.

GROUP B:

1. Shelly Ennis
2. Arne Handley
3. Willy Brees
4. James Rempel
5. Marilyn Humphries
6. Lorne Cooper
7. Joyce Miller
- 8.

GROUP C:

1. Wendy Freeman
2. Joanna Fisher
3. Ray Martens
4. Corinne Wikjord
5. Lois Taylor
6. Val Brade
7. Mary Nygaard
- 8.

GROUP D:

1. Mark Heinrichs
2. Jim Middleton
3. Randee Guscott
4. Rod Zaugg
5. Sue Moench
6. Greg Ingram
7. Imogene Hoff
- 8.

GROUP E:

1. Dave Luyten
2. Penny Drysdale
3. Carlene Ethier
4. Linda Davidchuk
5. Glen Giduk
6. Karen Love
7. Darrell Bonogofsky
- 8.

GROUP F:

1. Dave Rozdeba
2. Roland Gnam
3. Christine Price
4. Al Tisnic
5. Carla Jones
6. Diane Bell
7. Jan Painter-Macleod
- 8.

Note: Any parents in attendance are invited to join any grouping!

All staff members were given this agenda. This included teachers, secretarial staff, custodial staff, as well as our School Council Chairperson, and the Student Council Members.

On November 8, 1994, attendance at this special after-school session was as follows: 3 members from Group A, 3 members from Group B, 4 members from Group C, 3 members from Group D, 3 members from Group E, and 3 members from Group F. Present in these groups were the two administrative secretaries as well as two Student Council Members, two Student Teachers, and our School Council Chairperson.

In the absence of several staff members, the groups were compressed from six groups to three.

The task of the participants was to brainstorm on the question:

"What kind of school would you like to work in?"

The intent of such a session was to get some indication of the type of work environment that staff would envision for AJHS and then take steps to work toward such goals.

The following raw data was produced by the three groups' brainstorming:

- ▶ academic/school work stressed, not entertainment of kids
- ▶ non-academics have equal emphasis as with academics
- ▶ professional growth of educators adapt to changes of society
- ▶ non-biased atmosphere whether you are a student or a staff member
- ▶ flexible environment
- ▶ actively supports professional growth of educators
- ▶ students, teachers and parents know it is a three way package
- ▶ program, facility, timetable is pedagogically in keeping with age of students served by school
- ▶ longer lunch hour - slowed pace of day - serene environment
- ▶ safe and caring environment from staff to students
- ▶ emphasize integrated learning
- ▶ student focussed
- ▶ sense of spirit and motivation
- ▶ education is broad and supported by all partners in the process
- ▶ many options available for all levels of learning in a non-threatening environment
- ▶ team-teaching and cooperative
- ▶ more visibility of parent groups in daily workings of school
- ▶ alternatives for at risk learners (greatest discipline difficulty, give other options to fit learning style)
- ▶ people who work and live in school respect each other
- ▶ leadership opportunities for people in the school
- ▶ more parent involvement
- ▶ modern physical education facility
- ▶ investigate new leadership formats for schools - what is current and experimented with
- ▶ modern technology complete with vcr in each room
- ▶ discipline rule-orientated environment with positive consequences for kids too
- ▶ higher, controlled standards of achievement
- ▶ upgrade discipline policy
- ▶ consistent teacher/student ratio
- ▶ less fundraising more basics
- ▶ staff cooperation
- ▶ renovated building
- ▶ more relaxed atmosphere
- ▶ more windows in every room
- ▶ priority given to student conduct and behaviour and attitude
- ▶ four day work week
- ▶ bigger ladies washroom
- ▶ less crowded conditions
- ▶ more student leadership
- ▶ consistency and uniformity in enforcing rules (staff and administration)
- ▶ better communication throughout school (eg. extended home rooms)
- ▶ progressive, more student ownership schooling
- ▶ phones in room
- ▶ more out of classroom space for students
- ▶ paint the walls something nice
- ▶ more communication by teachers to administration
- ▶ make the school bigger - grades 6, 7, 8 - more middle school (no grade nines)
- ▶ Saturday Schooling
- ▶ more storage areas

- ▶ common set of rules
- ▶ modern dramatic / performing art facility
- ▶ keep abreast of problems (students and parents)
- ▶ adequate high tech equip, software, service, workshops
- ▶ works together
- ▶ everyone treated with respect
- ▶ more time during school day
- ▶ students and staff want to be here
- ▶ tranquil environment
- ▶ camaraderie between teachers and administration
- ▶ students are active in their education
- ▶ teach in areas of expertise
- ▶ quick action on discipline
- ▶ orderly and caring environment
- ▶ repeat discipline problem students are acted on more severely
- ▶ student responsibility for clean environment (ie. lunchroom)
- ▶ facilities add natural light and positive atmosphere
- ▶ meet learning needs of students
- ▶ larger bathrooms with fans
- ▶ good and available copying equipment
- ▶ all teachers have easy access to phones
- ▶ adequate furnishings (ie. lockers)
- ▶ adequate PE facilities for all students
- ▶ broad, liberal arts education
- ▶ enough text materials that are treated with respect
- ▶ strong teacher support for academic, extra-curricular programs
- ▶ discipline and consequences are consistent
- ▶ school prepares students to be successful in their future
- ▶ parents support school
- ▶ good heating and cooling
- ▶ bells are more gentle

A similar process was undertaken with parents. A special bulletin was sent home with students notifying their parents/guardians of a session on November 17, 1994, where discussion of the question, "**What kind of school would you like for your child?**" would take place. The raw data from this session (at which 16 parents were present) was as follows:

- ▶ teachers have adequate teaching resources and adequate professional development
- ▶ emphasize positive attributes of students
- ▶ reasonable class sizes (1-22)
- ▶ well planned, laid out discipline policy for teachers /students/parents
- ▶ community liaison worker between school and community agencies
- ▶ basic coping skills taught for students of dysfunctional families
- ▶ parent support group for parents
- ▶ positive public relations for celebrating success / positive attitude toward community
- ▶ establishes positive self-esteem and confidence
- ▶ kind of traditional structure but flexible
- ▶ to become a three year school (6, 7, 8 grades)
- ▶ focuses on giving to others instead of the "me" attitude
- ▶ major emphasis on study habits to get best possible education
- ▶ adequate and up-to-date resources
- ▶ open communication between home and school
- ▶ understanding teachers to meet individual needs
- ▶ adequate physical plant - enough room
- ▶ bright, cheerful facility
- ▶ exchange AJHS with the Remand Centre
- ▶ inspiring and well focussed
- ▶ teaches them to think for themselves
- ▶ encourage involvement in extra-curricular
- ▶ appreciates individuality
- ▶ socially rewarding
- ▶ a fun place to be
- ▶ promotes student self-esteem/confidence and wellness
- ▶ offers sufficient programs for all levels of learning so no one falls through the cracks
- ▶ treats them with respect and teaches respect toward others
- ▶ encourages student responsibility
- ▶ are responsibility for own actions
- ▶ children not lectured at but have opportunity to interact with teacher
- ▶ safe environment
- ▶ healthy environment encouraging children to develop into the best they can be

- ▶ grow physically, emotionally, academically
- ▶ keeps up with technological changes
- ▶ positive, caring environment
- ▶ keep school interesting
- ▶ free and welcome to give opinions not teacher's opinions and views forced on them
- ▶ academically stimulating
- ▶ challenging, innovative
- ▶ accessible, fun, effective, welcoming, learning encouraged, ability to motivate students/staff
- ▶ safe
- ▶ encourages a child to excel in area of interest
- ▶ students equal chances to raise opinion
- ▶ balance academic and sports
- ▶ stress academics first
- ▶ positive, disciplined
- ▶ more academic rewards - achievement
- ▶ everyone a learner / everyone a teacher
- ▶ instill a sense of community
- ▶ place with morals and values
- ▶ equipped - tools to learn with - textbooks, computers, staffing
- ▶ friendly
- ▶ encourage individual wants and needs
- ▶ school should be fun and busy place
- ▶ more positive - less negative
- ▶ positive role models and feedback, lots of encouragement
- ▶ caring and safe place
- ▶ disciplinary problems are dealt wo they don't interfere with others
- ▶ stimulating environment to meet emotional and academic needs
- ▶ attractive display of student work as it is
- ▶ lots of activities to meet other students from feeder schools
- ▶ recognize good behaviour, good attitudes, and good sportsmanship
- ▶ total communication between parents/students/staff
- ▶ place that expands the learning process
- ▶ less peer pressure and social pressure (everyone is treated equally)
- ▶ good variety of resources of available literature, community speakers
- ▶ parents continue to input to extra-curricular events (ie. sports teams, science)

On December 12, 1994, during an afternoon class, the students were given an opportunity to respond to the question, "What kind of school would you like to attend?" The students were randomly selected from an alphabetical listing (every eighth student chosen from the list). Their collective brainstorming and raw data are given below:

- ▶ computers for all work
- ▶ band in grade 8
 - if not taken in grade 7
- ▶ more extended and night dances
- ▶ longer lunch
- ▶ better teachers -- attitude wise
- ▶ wear anything you want
- ▶ smoking on campus
- ▶ better food in cafeteria
- ▶ exciting teachers
- ▶ better music at dances
- ▶ open campus for visitors
- ▶ outdoor basketball court
- ▶ organized
- ▶ smaller class sizes
- ▶ classroom on roof
- ▶ soccer team
- ▶ bigger facility
- ▶ bigger rooms in gym -- a better gym
- ▶ chew gum in every class
- ▶ more mirrors
- ▶ strive to new heights
- ▶ more non-sport activities
- ▶ hats in school
- ▶ more money on student needs (not mirrors, on CD's)
- ▶ small classes
- ▶ bigger school overall
- ▶ more warnings from teachers
- ▶ more time to switch classes
- ▶ other types of sports teams (football)
- ▶ teachers are more fun
- ▶ more options to choose from and in the schedule
- ▶ an actual "restaurant" type of cafeteria
- ▶ cheerier classrooms not so dull looking
- ▶ nice teachers -- younger teachers
- ▶ playground -- swings/tires
- ▶ lower prices on food
- ▶ shorter classes
- ▶ less time before school (add it on at lunch or out sooner)
- ▶ smoking section in cafeteria
- ▶ less homework
- ▶ no homework
- ▶ larger bathrooms
- ▶ paper towels/tissue in bathrooms always
- ▶ teachers more aware -- if people bugged
- ▶ some teachers do not care
- ▶ heated girls change room no smell
- ▶ better ball diamonds
- ▶ larger lockers
- ▶ electronic locks
- ▶ one person per locker and bring own locks
- ▶ allowed walkmans in class
- ▶ more water fountains
- ▶ longer noon hour
- ▶ no partner lockers
- ▶ another place to buy food for lunch
- ▶ bigger gym
- ▶ good educational system

- ▶ bigger lockers
- ▶ more fun activities at lunch
- ▶ sell subs at lunch
- ▶ bigger hallways
- ▶ get out earlier on Fridays
- ▶ open campus
- ▶ longer time to catch buses
- ▶ music during classes
- ▶ more computer classes
- ▶ more dances and better music
- ▶ allowed to pass notes in class
- ▶ allowed to eat in class
- ▶ no consequence room
- ▶ beds to lay down when sick
- ▶ benches in hallways
- ▶ nicer stage
- ▶ allowed roller blades
- ▶ more bean bags in library
- ▶ bigger classrooms
- ▶ able to eat in halls
- ▶ three day weekends
- ▶ more cafeteria food selections
- ▶ outdoor basketball court
- ▶ three school days a week
- ▶ shorter periods
- ▶ bigger school
- ▶ bigger newspaper
- ▶ longer Xmas vacation
- ▶ elevator instead of stairs
- ▶ longer summer vacations
- ▶ larger bathrooms with stalls that close
- ▶ more choices for classes
- ▶ longer break between classes
- ▶ keep portables unlocked
- ▶ greenhouse in school
- ▶ more balls for open gym
- ▶ more outside activities
- ▶ more ski trips
- ▶ get rid of portables
- ▶ locker room that doesn't smell
- ▶ arcade in school
- ▶ larger change rooms
- ▶ more time to change out for gym
- ▶ larger gym lockers
- ▶ water slide at school
- ▶ no dress code
- ▶ more school field trips
- ▶ school pool
- ▶ break between every period
- ▶ a free period
- ▶ buses come later in a.m.
- ▶ be able to eat candy at snack time
- ▶ buses wait longer after school
- ▶ more buses
- ▶ everybody takes buses
- ▶ school begins later in a.m.
- ▶ more comfortable desks
- ▶ stricter teachers
- ▶ no detentions at lunch
- ▶ not as much punishment
- ▶ way more day and evening dances
- ▶ open campus -- morning and noon
- ▶ more sporting activities -- skiing
- ▶ longer breaks between classes
- ▶ longer lunch hour
- ▶ fun teachers
- ▶ fair school
- ▶ individual lockers for all
- ▶ later start -- ex. 9:00 a.m.
- ▶ less work in class and homework
- ▶ more time to get to buses
- ▶ more option classes during the day
- ▶ more sport teams
- ▶ better music for dances
- ▶ stop alternating grades for dismissal
- ▶ get out early every Wednesday or Friday
- ▶ all grade 8's go on field trips together
- ▶ not just 1 or 2 classes get to go
- ▶ get rid of old teachers (under 45 is O.K.)
- ▶ understanding teachers
- ▶ talk to teachers about tempers -- don't get mad as easy
- ▶ more places and benches in foyer
- ▶ shorter school day

- ▶ more variety of hot lunch foods
- ▶ lower prices for hot lunch
- ▶ more fun classroom activities
- ▶ shorter classes
- ▶ all teachers let kids chew gum
- ▶ longer time to change for gym
- ▶ hats can be worn in school
- ▶ class at end of the day to get homework done -- tutorial

Having met with all stakeholders (parents, students, and teachers) a small group of teachers, with the approval of the parent council, took it upon themselves to go through every statement in order to delete those statements which were not possible (due to monetary restraints), those statements which were not realistic (due to legal or contractual obligations of teachers), and those statements that were duplicates or similar in ideas to others. In tackling such a "paring down task" the overriding goals were two-fold:

- 1. To produce a good, comprehensive, but workable summary of statements from all three stakeholders' lists.**

- 2. To categorize ideas in groupings that could be used in developing vision statements. Such statements would be able to grasp the overall desires of all of the participants -- producing a set of clear statements from which to build the school mission statement, as well as provide direction for the future.**

The revised lists were then given to another staff member, chosen at random, to verify that such revisions were accurate and appropriate.

It should be noted that many of the student responses were deleted and disregarded in the above process. The reason for such action was that a large number of statements were tied to monetary requirements which were plainly not realistic, given recent government decisions and cutbacks to education. Every effort, in a positive way, was done to keep the underlying meaning

of the student ideas. For example, it was felt that many student statements could be summarized in more general terms such as "wanting an enthusiastic and energetic teaching staff", or, "wanting facilities that met the junior high demands". As well, many statements specific to teachers were also removed because they ran counter to contractual and professional obligations that were in place.

The teacher and parent ideas had many similarities and congruencies. This helped to increase the desire to develop a shared vision and mission amongst the staff. It was nice to feel that similar ideals for Alexandra were being presented from both parties.

Following this latest refinement, the newly revised lists were placed on recipe cards, idea by idea, for further scrutiny. In another after school session, the same small group of teachers (even though all staff members were invited to attend) spread the cards out on the floor and began to categorize the cards into various appropriate groupings. It was at this point that some further revision and summarizing of ideas took place as teachers tried to include the general meanings of a variety of statements within one working category. The summarizing was designed to produce a limited number of statements from which teachers hoped to develop vision statements that reflected the most common and most frequent ideas from all three groups of participants. Every effort and much time was spent to try to ensure that as many ideas as possible, from all of the groups, were reflected in a summarized statement or in a separate category.

The results of this summarizing and categorizing was as follows:

WHAT TYPE OF SCHOOL WOULD WE LIKE AJHS TO BE?

Curriculum/Instruction:

- Options courses/Career and Technology Studies/non-academics should have the same emphasis as academics
- Stress academics first
- Be flexible to the learning needs of students

Parents:

- Liaison person between school and community
- More visibility of parent groups in the daily working of school

Student Schedule:

- To allow for a flexible schedule to accommodate the needs of students and staff

Discipline:

- Well defined disciplining policy with both positive and negative consequences
- More serious consequences for repeat offenders

Students:

- Students are encouraged to be responsible and active in their education
- Increased opportunity for student leadership
- Students have increased access to technological materials

Facility:

Teachers provide an atmosphere conducive to learning even though the facility needs modernizing

Professional Staff:

- Teachers need to adapt to changes in society -- continued professional growth is important

Environment:

- Stimulating environment to meet emotional and academic needs
- Establishes positive self-esteem, confidence, and wellness
- Encourages communication between parents/students/staff
- Encourages involvement in extra-curricular
- Encourages positive attitudes and respect towards our school and community
- A welcoming environment that provides a sense of spirit and motivation
- Safe and caring environment for staff and parents
- Encourages high standards of achievement

Program:

Become a three year school to promote a sense of pride for the AJHS community

With these statements ready, it was time for the Vision Group to validate the work that had been done to ensure that the statements represented the interests, thoughts, and desires of the parents, teachers, and students who make up the Alexandra Community.

Meetings were scheduled for such validation on the following dates:

Staff: Wednesday, March 15, 1995 - 2:00 to 2:30 pm

Parents: Thursday, March 16, 1995 - 2:00 to 2:30 pm

Vision statements were provided ahead of time. The goal was to have the parties add, subtract, and/or change any statements as they deemed necessary. The students were not included in this process as it was decided this was merely an editing process and not another brainstorming session.

The results of the two validation meetings produced only a few changes (with many of the suggestions for change coming from the parent session). This was probably better to have it this way as teachers of the Vision Group had done the preliminary editing. The new statements were as follows:

**Alexandra Junior High School
Vision Statements**

**WHAT TYPE OF SCHOOL WOULD WE LIKE
AJHS TO BE?**

Curriculum/Instruction:

- Options courses/Career and Technology Studies/non-academics should play a significant role in the student's education
- Stress academics
- Be flexible to the learning needs of students
- Encourages growth in leadership and citizenship

Parents:

- Liaison person between school and community
- Parent groups should be more visible in the daily working of school

Student Schedule:

To allow for a flexible schedule to accommodate the needs of students and staff

Discipline:

- Well defined disciplining policy with both positive and negative consequences
- Alternative consequences for serious and repeat offenders
- Discipline policy should be developed with input from all stakeholders

Students:

- Students are encouraged to be responsible and active in their education
- Increased opportunity for student leadership to meet the needs of all types of students
- Students have optimum access to technology that can be provided

Professional Staff:

- Teachers need the opportunity to continue professional growth so they can meet the changes of society.

Resources:

- Stimulating and well equipped environment to meet emotional and academic needs

Environment:

- Teachers provide atmosphere conducive to learning even though the facility needs modernizing
- Establishes positive self-esteem, confidence, and wellness
- Encourages communication between parents/students/staff
- Encourages involvement in extra-curricular
- Encourages positive attitudes and respect towards our school, community, and each other
- A welcoming environment that provides a sense of spirit, motivation, and pride
- Safe and caring environment for staff and parents
- Encourages high standards of achievement
- Open door policy to the family unit

Program:

Become a three year school to promote a sense of pride for the AJHS community

At this point, the Vision Group was finally at a stage to begin working on the actual value statements deemed most important to the school, as well as the development of the "plaque on the wall Mission Statement". It was felt that the work done so far was only to refine the thinking in order to be able to get at the core values common to all parties in the Alexandra Community.

The point had arrived to take some professional development time to have parents, students, and staff work at the same time, in the same area, to begin producing the final product. A meeting was scheduled for March 31, 1995. Since it would be difficult to get a good selection of parents to a day time work session, the staff agreed to hold some of its professional development in the evening of March 30, 1995, and then do some other work on the morning of March 31, 1995 (with the afternoon off to compensate for the evening session).

Notices went out to parents, via the students, explaining the purpose of the meeting and inviting parents and students to aid in this Mission Building Session. On the back of the notices were placed the revised Vision Statements to help all parties come to the session prepared and focused on what the Alexandra Community had already defined as areas of importance. To try and ensure that students would attend such a work session (especially with the next day being a day off for them), special letters of invitation were given to the Representatives of Student Council and its Executive Members.

From the moment the validation sessions were set, planning began for the format and structure of the Mission Building Session with the parents, teachers, and students. The Vision Group

continued to invite all staff members to its planning session, but responsibility for the coordination of this Professional Development Portion of the process began to fall to this writer. It was important, even though this was a collective process, that one person be seen as the "go to person" to ensure that all aspects for the evening were being covered.

The results of the planning produced the following agenda:

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT - MARCH 30, 1995 - 7:00-8:30

EVENING AGENDA

7:00 pm - Parents, Students and Staff gather in Multi-Purpose Room

7:00-7:15 pm - History of process, summary of the data, where we are hoping to go with the data

- Examples of Value Statements

Introduce the statement:

" AJHS IS A PLACE WHERE STUDENTS, STAFF, PARENTS, AND THE COMMUNITY ARE COMMITTED TO..."

7:15-7:25 pm Ice Breaker Activity to put participants into groups

- Groups head to assigned rooms

7:25-7:30 pm - Name chosen for each group

- Facilitator of group explains process for participants to follow

7:30-8:15 pm - Groups brainstorm ideas that reflect the data that was collected in answer to the general statement above

- record information on chart paper

- provide group members with five GREEN dots and explain purpose upon return to MPR

- return to MPR and post recorded information

8:15-8:30 pm - circulate MPR and vote on information from all groups

8:30-9:00 pm - lunch served; the evening is complete

9:00-10:00 pm - interested staff members collate information as voted upon by the large group

At the evening meeting, I became "the keynote speaker". I have attached my initial comments to aid in understanding the process of the evening:

March 30, 1995 **OPENING REMARKS** Evening Agenda

Welcome to all staff, students, and parents.

HISTORY: *Last year our school received a very positive evaluation.*

Staff members felt as times change and students change so should AJHS be evolving to meet the new demands -- What better time to do this than at a point of strength; with the supportive evaluation.

This task was too much for one person to accomplish; nor would we want only one person's views.
(SHOW QUESTIONS COMIC O.H.)

So we called on parents, students and AJHS staff to provide input into what kind of school they would like AJHS to be.

It has been a longer process than anticipated - with the busy schedule of all stakeholders involved - but after Christmas we were able to collect a strong set of statements that hopefully represents all parties.

(SHOW VISION DATA O.H. - explain a bit)

Based on this information, we have gathered here tonight to hopefully complete the following statement:

(SHOW AJHS O.H.)

Our goal is to come up with a focussed set of value statements that will guide AJHS in activities/changes for the future - based on the collective data.

(SHOW EXAMPLES OF VALUES O.H. - explain a bit)

Individually this is a monstrous task. Collectively, this, may be, is a manageable task.

Teachers have kindly accepted the role of facilitator for group work tonight.

We will use the Cooperative Process Model to get as much input from each and every person as possible.

For those of you who may not have been through this process it is used for the following reasons:
(SHOW COOPERATIVE O.H. explain)

Our staff volunteers are highly skilled technicians and have spent hours training with this process to get maximum benefit.

(SHOW COOPERATIVE COMIC O.H.)

(SHOW AGENDA O.H.) Unfortunately or maybe fortunately, we have about 45 minutes to try and accomplish this task. After the sharing session, each of you will receive "5 green dots" to come back to the MPR and vote on the statements, from all the groups, that you think are best -- hopefully providing the values for AJHS.

It will be during this time that a luncheon, provided by our Parent Council, will be set out. (THANK PARENT COUNCIL)

Now in a moment I'm going to call up Mrs. Ethier to explain the activity that will help put us into groups.

What we do need from each and everyone tonight is a set of value statements to help AJHS move forward and remain the strong educational organization it has already proven to be.

(SHOW AJHS STATEMENT O.H. AGAIN)

Thank you very much for coming and for your efforts tonight and GOOD LUCK!!

(Call Mrs. Ethier - PUT UP ROOM ASSIGN. O.H.)

The turn out for the evening was the entire teaching staff, three support staff members, twelve parents, and two students. Although the numbers were not overwhelming, the attempt to get staff, parents, and students together was important; even though the turnout was low from the parent and student point of view, it was a key step in the collaborative process of building a mission statement.

After working in small groups, the members were to return with ideas about values that were to become the core statements for Alexandra Junior High School. Each group's raw data is presented below. It should be noted, before group work began, participants were informed that their raw data was to be posted. All participants in the evening's activities was given five dots with which to vote on the statement(s) that they felt were most important as a value at Alexandra Junior High School. A person could use all five dots for one statement or any combination of statements up to five. Such choices amongst the group participants are shown in parentheses following the statement that received the votes. The raw data and voting was as follows:

AJHS IS A PLACE WHERE STUDENTS, STAFF, AND PARENTS ARE COMMITTED TO:

Smilers:

- safe learning environment
- independent thinkers and learners through cooperative activities **(1 vote)**
- keeping up with the changes of the world
- committed to varied academic and emotional development of all students
- bridging the learning walkway between elementary and high school **(4 votes)**
- respect towards school community and each other
- committed to providing an environment where all stake holders grow physically, emotionally, and academically **(1 vote)**
- well rounded education for all students
- everyone should learn and do activities together **(1 vote)**
- encouraging students to become productive people in our society
- developing independent thinkers capable of surviving and advancing in a constantly changing world
- creating a stimulating learning process without frustration
- best instruction and interaction with the student and community recognizing challenges and frustration of adolescents
- providing open communication and interaction of all players to promote an educational environment fit to prepare our children for our future **(1 vote)**
- a safe, caring, stimulating environment where high standards of achievement are encouraged in all endeavours **(20 votes)**
- well equipped facility **(1 vote)**
- flexibility in scheduling
- cooperative involvement amongst all stake holders in education
- communicating ideas and ideals and problems which arise
- develop sense of pride and spirit and confidence
- where all feel productive and worthwhile and strive to become good, active citizens
- increase student leadership
- keeping class sizes at a student/teacher ratio which will facilitate learning not merely crowd control **(16 votes)**
- individuals being responsible for own actions
increase access to new technology
- a place where a discipline policy is defined that is fair and just

The Blue Birds

- providing the best education possible in a positive and safe environment
- encourage growth in leadership and citizenship
- personal excellence is encouraged by promoting academic, social, and emotional commitment **(1 vote)**
- academics with the right to learn with both positive and negative consequences
- a safe environment where every student has the right to fulfil his/her academic potential **(5 votes)**
- a positive and caring environment so all students can acquire essential knowledge, attitudes and skills, necessary for the twenty-first century **(13 votes)**
- instilling a notion of freedom with responsibility regarding the pursuit of personal success and academic achievement **(1 vote)**
- working together cooperatively and investing in our children's future
- a commitment to technological upgrading and modernization of all facilities in order to create a unique and transitional learning institution **(1 vote)**

The Blue Marker Group

- encouragement for the child
- meeting the academic, physical, and emotional needs of all students and teachers -- to aid in development of responsible citizens and future leaders **(17 votes)**
- encourages high standard of achievement in all areas of study (academic and non-academic)
- to continue to promote group activities both during and after school hours
- meeting the changing needs of society **(1 vote)**
- committed to mutual motivation to encourage high standards of attitude and achievements **(4 votes)**
- to foster a partnership between the home, the school, and the community **(1 vote)**
- a safe and caring environment for staff and students
- create an environment in which teachers, students, and parents are active in
- committed to communication between all educational partners **(1 vote)**
- encouraging each other to become responsible, productive citizens by being good role models **(2 votes)**
- to provide opportunities for the student to grow emotionally and intellectually **(1 vote)**
- an inviting environment that provides a sense of spirit, motivation and pride **(5 votes)**
- an open door policy to the family unit
- taking responsibility for one's actions having consequences of both positive and negative sanctions **(16 votes)**
- adapting to the needs of the educational stakeholders
- establishing good relations toward a common goal of success

- to provide opportunities for student leadership (1 vote)
- optimum access to current technology (3 votes)

The Green Marker Group

- providing knowledge and skills to function in a technologically changing society (1 vote)
- providing a school that provides the common values of the community
- nurturing creativity (11 votes)
- providing a safe and caring environment
- provides opportunity for leadership
- encourage and facilitate communication (2 votes)
- promoting diversity (3 votes)
- encouraging respect and responsibility towards our school, community and each other (2 votes)
- high standards of achievement
- encourage and stimulate high standards of learning and achievement while equipping those needs (1 vote)
- emphasis on exploratory options
- necessary discipline to maintain a safe and orderly environment
- fostering respect and understanding for each others differences
- providing an environment that promotes the virtues of life
- encouraging excellence to the professional growth of our staff (3 votes)
- encouraging the development of positive self-esteem (5 votes)
- providing appropriate facilities that will enhance the programs of the school (2 votes)
- an inviting environment

The Major Leaguers

- academics by encouraging students to take an active and responsible role
- committed to preparing children for all aspects of adult life (emotionally, academically, socially) (1 vote)
- encouraging students to be active and responsible participants in their education
- encouraging respect and cooperation towards peers, the school, and the community
- stressing academics
- excellence academically and socially
high standards of achievement (4 votes)
- development of critical thinking skills (1 vote)
- promoting positive attitudes and respect for each other and the school
- to creating a healthy, stimulating atmosphere conducive to learning
- to open communication between staff, students, parents and the community (1 vote)
- to a structured discipline policy
- a safe and caring environment for staff and students (1 vote)

- displaying positive leadership qualities
- to good citizenship and positive self-images
- promoting the idea of lifelong learning **(1 vote)**
- recognizing that with rights and privileges comes responsibility **(17 votes)**
- a stimulating learning environment **(2 votes)**
- forging strong links between the classroom and the workplace
- preparing students for the future
- development of strong communication skills **(1 vote)**

The Slippery Snowmen with Yellow Polka-dotted Bikinis

- to professional and personal growth to meet the needs of all students and staff
- to a high quality of education in a safe, secure environment, using available resources. This will be accomplished by parents and students being responsible for their part and respecting and encouraging others as they do their part.
- define a clear discipline policy with positive and negative consequences **(1 vote)**
- to encourage respect and positive attitudes
- being totally involved in the educational process and level appropriate to grades 7 and 8 for the benefit of all participants -- students/parents/teachers **(1 vote)**
- the ongoing professional development of teachers, so that they can continue to progress in offering teaching excellence **(2 votes)**
- high standards of achievement, offered by a well-equipped environment, allowing a flexible schedule for both students and staff, allowing teachers to continue professional growth **(4 votes)**
- to providing an atmosphere that stimulates and nourishes positive self-esteem, confidence and wellness **(3 votes)**
- a strong discipline policy, with parental support, which encourages students to be responsible and active in their education and out in the community **(12 votes)**
- open communication between all stakeholders, all taking responsibility for the education of students at AJHS **(1 vote)**
- becoming a three-year school (gr. 7-9, or gr. 6-8) that encourages growth and leadership and citizenship to encourage motivation and provide a sense of spirit and pride **(4 votes)**
- to a responsible, positive, education with a well-defined discipline policy to encourage strong leaders for tomorrow
- articulation between teachers and parents in an effort to encourage parental awareness of and support for the programs of AJHS
- providing a well-rounded education where academics and a variety of options are provided to meet the challenges of a technological future **(10 votes)**
- to meet the needs of both teachers and students/support staff, and to encourage positive self-esteem, confidence and wellness of all
- to bringing the facility up to standards in order to provide a safe, effective and motivational environment **(7 votes)**

- creating a flexible schedule for students and staff to promote wellness, positive self-esteem and confidence **(11 votes)**
- excellence in all curricular areas, in order to nurture a variety of students strengths **(2 votes)**
- the constructive involvement of parents and students in promoting the overall progress of Alexandra

At the end of the evening session, a group of teachers volunteered to stay behind and tabulate the results. These volunteers also compiled the statements that received the most votes for all participants to be able to see the results of their work. The following twelve statements stood out (not in any particular order):

- 1 - a safe, caring, and stimulating environment where high standards of achievement are encouraged in all endeavours.
- 2 - keeping class sizes at a student/teacher ratio which will facilitate learning not merely crowd control
- 3 - a safe environment where every student has the right to fulfil his or her academic potential
- 4 - a positive and caring environment so all students can acquire essential knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary for 21st century living
- 5 - meeting the academic, physical, and emotional needs of all students and teachers -- to aid in the development of responsible citizens and future leaders
- 6 - taking responsibility for one's actions; having consequences of both positive and negative sanctions
- 7 - recognizing that with rights and privileges comes responsibility
- 8 - a strong discipline policy with parental support which encourages students to be responsible and active in their education and out in the community
- 9 - providing a well rounded education where academics and a variety of options are provided to meet the challenges of a technological future
- 10 - nurturing creativity
- 11 - to bring the facility up to standards in order to provide a safe, effective, and motivational environment
- 12 - creating a flexible schedule for students and staff to promote wellness, positive self-esteem, and confidence

These statements were provided to all staff members as well as the school council members (whether they attended the session or not). It was at this point that the original Vision Group, with the permission of the parents and staff, took it upon themselves to consider the above statements and combine, edit, and transform the twelve statements into a more concise and realistic grouping of statements that would be called the Alexandra Value Statements. Although it would have been great to have as many participants as possible in this process, it was agreed by staff and parents that a core group would be more efficient. Their only request, as with the entire process, was to be kept informed and be allowed input at each stage of the drafts of the value statements. The twelve points above were synthesized into six value statements. The statements below are provided after two revisions by staff and parents -- the numbers in brackets, after each of the statements, represent those particular statements, from the initial twelve, that the "new" statement was to encompass more fully.

AJHS IS A PLACE WHERE STUDENTS, STAFF, PARENTS, AND THE COMMUNITY ARE COMMITTED TO:

- a safe, caring, and stimulating environment where high standards of achievement are encouraged (covered 1, 2, 3, 10, 11)*
- meeting the academic, physical, and emotional needs of all students and teachers (covered 2, 5)*
- a strong discipline policy which encourages accountability for actions (covered 6, 7, 8)*
- providing a program of academics and complementary courses that meet the challenges of a technological future (covered 4, 9)*
- enhancing the development of responsible citizens (covered 5, 6, 7)*
- promoting individual wellness by creating opportunities to work cooperatively (covered 10, 12)*

Whether it was because staff and parents were overwhelmed, tired, or pleased with the results, the first draft did not receive much criticism. It seemed, based on informal comments, that the essence of the twelve statements had been captured appropriately.

A second draft dealt with semantics. The Vision Group soon realized it would be impossible to please everyone. However, with the staff providing the most scrutiny, the following statements became the Value Statements for AJHS:

AJHS IS A PLACE WHERE STUDENTS, STAFF, PARENTS, AND THE COMMUNITY ARE COMMITTED TO:

- **a safe and caring environment**
- **a stimulating environment where high standards of achievement are encouraged**
- **meeting the academic, physical, and emotional needs of students**
- **a strong discipline policy which encourages accountability for actions**
- **providing a program of academics and complementary courses that meet the challenges of a rapidly changing future**
- **enhancing the development of responsible citizens**
- **promoting individual wellness**

This stage of the process had finally come to a conclusion. Now came another equally important task -- the "plaque on the wall" (as one parent put it) mission statement. The development of the mission statement was not considered until this stage of the process was finalized. It was hoped that with the value statements representing the "meat" of what AJHS and its members stood for, it would be easier to arrive at the overall philosophy of a mission statement. There was a fear that without some parameters to guide the creation of the mission statement, some extremely unrealistic, wordy text would result, one not representative of the beliefs of all partners in the Alexandria community. The value statements were needed to provide fundamental guidance as mission building began.

On May 11, 1995, a special meeting was called for teachers who desired to work on the development of a Mission Statement as well as volunteer members of our Parent Council. The Agenda and other information for the meeting was as follows:

VISION AGENDA - May 11, 1995

Topic: Development of a Mission Statement

Place: AJHS - Room 106

Time: 7:00 p.m.

The purpose of this meeting is to begin the process of developing a new Mission Statement for Alexandra Junior High School. A process to follow may include:

1. Describe/discuss the purpose of a Mission Statement
 - look at examples of mission statements
 - discuss what a Mission Statement should include

2. Begin the process of drafting a Mission Statement for AJHS
 - look at "Mission Activity" for possible steps to follow

3. Discuss the need for future meetings and times
 - set a tentative date for completion of the Mission Statement
 - examine the need for a School Slogan
 - consider Goals of AJHS for the future (5 year time frame)

PURPOSE OF MISSION STATEMENTS:

The Mission Statement specifies the fundamental reason for the school's existence and the role the school plays in the community. In conjunction with values, it is the basis from which goals and objectives are developed.

The Mission Statement should focus on the distinct competencies of the school - **those qualities of your school that set it apart from others.**

Examples:

- (MHSD) *As a partner in education, Medicine Hat School District No. 76 is committed to offer an appropriate education within a caring and innovative environment enabling its students to pursue their goals and dreams!*
- (AJHS) *It is the school's purpose to ENSURE INDIVIDUAL STUDENT DEVELOPMENT THROUGH EFFECTIVE EDUCATION.*
- (MHHS) *Medicine Hat High School is a "community of learners" where an appropriate education, within a caring and innovative environment, will enable all to pursue their goals and dreams.*
- (CHHS) *Our Mission is to engage our school community in the creation of a flexible, caring environment which nurtures lifelong learning, social responsibility and personal excellence.*
- (Unified School) *Dedicated to educating today for tomorrow, the Unified School educates all students in an integrated setting to become responsible, literate, thinking and contributing members of a global society.*
- (Star Trek) *It is our five year mission to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no man has gone before!*

PARTS OF A MISSION STATEMENT:

Usually written as one statement, a Mission Statement has three parts:

1. **What:** Rather than the services you provide now, define the *needs* your school is attempting to fill.

2. **For Whom:** In order to focus resources on your prime target.

3. **How:** What are the means of delivering your services? Consider teaching methods, resources, technologies and manner.

(Tymko, 1992, p. 14)

Attached to this Agenda were the value statements as well as the previous AJHS Mission Statement. The Mission Activity outlined in the Agenda was also given in a step-by-step format (Tymko, 1992, p. 15):

Mission Activity

Goal: To draft a mission statement for the school

Materials - "Eight Criteria for Evaluating a Mission Statement"

Process:

1. Facilitator describes the purpose of a mission statement and shows examples.
2. Group focuses on the three parts of a mission statement: What?, For Whom?, and How?

3. Group brainstorms responses to:

What do we do to meet the needs of our customers?
 - What needs are we attempting to fill?
 What business are we in?

Facilitator records and posts responses

4. Group discusses and decides For Whom the school provides services

Facilitator records and posts responses

5. Group brainstorms responses to:

- How do we deliver our services? (Consider teaching methods, resources, technology, manner)

Facilitator records and posts responses

6. Facilitator divides group into teams of 3-5 people. Each team combines elements of What, For Whom, and How on the posted flip charts into a statement that begins with "Our Mission is to...".

7. Teams post their draft mission statements. The group then combines and edits these statements into one school mission statement.

8. Group evaluates the school mission statement using the "Eight Criteria for Evaluating a Mission Statement."

As the meeting progressed, participants spent a great deal of time discussing the process that had taken place with the development of the Value Statements as well as the statements themselves. This was done to be sure everyone was clear on what had occurred and where we were heading. However, steps one and two had to be postponed as the discussion time (although productive and seemingly necessary) took almost one hour. As a group we felt it would not be beneficial to begin developing a mission statement and have to stop because the hour was late. It was felt that another meeting should be called next week during which steps one and two could be tackled.

The members present did look at item three on the agenda and set a June 1, 1996 goal for completion of the Mission Statement. The idea of a School Slogan was passed around as well. However, it was felt that the Mission Statement had priority before a slogan was developed or even considered. Depending on how close to the June 1 deadline development of the Mission Statement came, time could be allotted for a slogan accordingly. There was a brief discussion of goals for AJHS for the future, but it seemed to be too soon for such talk as our focus for the school (Value Statements, Mission Statement) had not yet come to completion. The group members left with the agenda (items one and two) set for the meeting in one week's time.

At the next Mission Development meeting, I acted as facilitator. I walked the same members through item one of the Agenda, focussing on the examples, and then we began the work of developing our own statement, as outlined in the Mission Statement Activity.

We began by trying to answer the first question: What do we do to meet the needs of our customers? Each person's responses were written on the chalk board, in turn, after participants had been given some time to brainstorm.

With three chalkboards full of responses to the first question, one member of the group looked at the other two questions in the Mission Activity Sheet and asked if we hadn't covered those as well. For example, one of the phrases on the board was *commitment to the work*, which appeared to offer an answer to all three questions. We felt that we met our customers needs *through commitment to the work*, we are attempting to fill the students' need to learn through commitment, and we are in the business of helping students to learn *through commitment*. Through such discussion and analysis, the group concluded there was more than enough information to help us develop a solid mission statement. Accordingly, the group decided to move on to step six in the activity listing.

A further thirty minutes was spent combining and collecting similar ideas and phrases from the information on the boards. Slowly, the task of producing one statement that was to capture the essence of Alexandra Junior High School was becoming a little more possible.

The collective data was as follows:

- **fostering growth**
- **commitment to children (caring)**
- **sense of worth for self and others (respect) -- interaction between students/parents/teachers**
- **partnership of lifelong learners**
- **sense of belonging**

- **adapting to a technological and changing society**
- **challenging**
- **innovative**
- **collectively**
- **celebrate success**
- **empowering with knowledge/abilities for productive futures**

These statements became the backbone of our mission statement. It was at this point in the meeting that we took a brief reflective look at our value statements to ensure that there was a connection between the two important parts -- the mission data and the values of our school. It was felt that although they were not identical, and that was a good thing, there was harmony between this collective data and the value statements. Reassured, we continued with our process.

Our next task was to attempt to write an "all-encompassing" phrase with the collective data. Sharing thoughts as they came forth, many participants offered statements that began with "Our mission is to...", as the mission activity had outlined. Then, at one point, one member of the group began with a different phrase -- "Alexandra Junior High School is a partnership....", and a flood of new ideas came forth. What ensued was a session of combining parts of one phrase with parts of other phrases, resulting in some of the following:

Our mission is to foster a sense of belonging, and self-worth, empowering members of the Alexandra Community with knowledge and ability to meet future needs.

Our mission is to foster growth amongst the partnerships of lifelong learners at Alexandra, by empowering them with knowledge/abilities for productive futures.

A community devoted to enriching the academic and social well-being of its members thus impacting positively upon their futures.

Alexandra Junior High School is a partnership of individuals committed to achieving academic success, a sense of self-worth and responsibility, thus empowering students to meet the challenges of our changing technological society.

At Alexandra Junior High School, we are partners in lifelong learning, committed to empowering individuals to meet the demands of a rapidly changing world.

We are committed to a partnership of learning where students are challenged and empowered with knowledge, have a sense of belonging, can adapt to a changing society, have a feeling of respect for themselves and others, and can experience and celebrate success.

Having heard and recorded a variety of phrases, the group (realizing two and one-half hours had passed) chose what they felt were the most important ideas from all of the statements above. This was a similar activity to the second last step on the Mission Activity Sheet.

The most important ideas that the group wanted to include, based on the phrases given so far, were:

Life-long Learners, Partners, Celebrate Success, Meeting the Needs of the Future

With these ideas in mind, one member began with a phrase that all participants liked and we built the rest of the drafts from this phrase... "We at Alexandra...".

The next set of drafts came very quickly. They included:

We at Alexandra experience and celebrate success through a partnership in lifelong learning, with a commitment to challenge and empower individuals to adapt to a changing world.

We at Alexandra are partners in lifelong learning committed to empowering and challenging our members with knowledge and abilities that allow all of us to experience and celebrate success.

We at Alexandra are partners in lifelong learning fostering experiences and challenges that celebrate success and to prepare our members for the awaiting future.

Soon, participants thought they noticed a pattern of wordings emerging. We decided to write one last statement that we could take with us and refine. We would also pass this "generic" statement on to the rest of the staff for their input. The group came up with the following:

We at Alexandra are partners in lifelong learning committed to challenging and empowering individuals to _____ the awaiting future, through experience and celebrating success.

(Note: the blank was a word that the participants could not agree upon in any sense so it was left blank.)

At that point, copies of the "generic statement" were given to a group of very tired participants. The consensus of the group was to allow for one last review by other stakeholders, but

to have a solid draft statement ready within one week. I was to collect all of the ideas that might come forth and the original Vision Group members would agree on a final draft for staff and parents to ratify. Once again it was felt that the students, given their junior high level, would not want to be a big part of this process. We did not want to exclude them but we decided to allow Student Council to provide input into the "generic statement", within the one week time frame.

Very few new ideas came back from staff and the Student Council. We, the Vision Group, took this as a sign of support for the statement we had passed out. The following minor revisions were suggested:

- *the blank could be filled with -- confront, anticipate, deal with, pursue, embrace, to be prepared for*
- *the word "awaiting" was redundant and should be omitted*
- *some new ordering of the "generic statement" should occur*

Based on this information and within the week, the Vision Group offered the following phrase for the approval of staff, parents, and the student council:

We at Alexandra are partners in lifelong learning, dedicated to challenging and empowering individuals to pursue the future, by experiencing and celebrating success.

It should also be noted that during this one week of "generic statement" blitz, one of our support staff members suggested the following phrase (one she had seen from a Barbara Coloroso book) as our school slogan: "... Kids are worth it." Being compelled by her suggestion, but not wanting to copy the original suggestion, it was suggested that we use "... Because students are worth it!" Although it was not from a student's point of view, when informally presented to staff, many of them thought it was perfect in representing why we do what we do -- as parents, staff, and students. From the students' point of view, it was argued that this phrase did work because they, themselves, were worth it. As staff members mulled the phrase over in their minds, even the staff members who were not sold on it in the beginning came up to me and said that the more they thought about it, the more it was growing on them. When it was presented to parents, they proved to be the most enthusiastic of all for this statement.

With the three parts of our process now together -- a mission statement, school values, and a school slogan -- an update was sent out to the staff. We knew we would never be able to satisfy all of our staff so we worded the update carefully. It went as follows:

FOR ALL STAFF MEMBERS:

The following is (hopefully) a **final draft** of the mission statement, school slogan, and school values (based on the collective input of staff, parents, and students). **If these three "writings" seem reasonable and are "something you can live with", please write your initials in the space on the back of this sheet, indicating your acceptance of the mission, slogan, and values. If you have strong feelings against any of these statements and/or any part of these statements, please state such feelings on this sheet.** It is important to complete this part of the process, so your swift indulgence of this matter would be appreciated.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these statements!

Return the initialized sheet and/or a commented sheet to Mr. Heinrichs' Mailbox.

MISSION STATEMENT:

We at Alexandra are partners in lifelong learning, dedicated to challenging and empowering individuals to pursue the future, by experiencing and celebrating success.

SCHOOL SLOGAN:

... because students are worth it!

VALUE STATEMENTS:

AJHS IS A PLACE WHERE STUDENTS, STAFF, PARENTS, AND THE COMMUNITY ARE COMMITTED TO:

- a safe and caring environment
- a stimulating environment where high standards of achievement are encouraged
- meeting the academic, physical, and emotional needs of students
- a strong discipline policy which encourages accountability for actions
- providing a program of academic and complementary courses that meet the challenges of a rapidly changing future
- enhancing the development of responsible citizens
- promoting individual wellness

Please initialize here: _____

-----OR-----

Comments: _____

Within two days nearly all staff members had turned in their initialized forms or given verbal approval. There were still some staff members who gave their initials and commented on semantics as well. Members of the Vision Group went to these few staff members to discuss their thoughts on a more personal basis. Each one of them said they could live with what we had but just wanted to provide some food for thought -- one last time.

Upon that note, the three statements were ratified by members of the Student Council -- they did not seem too concerned and gave their positive appraisal -- and it was time to present these final versions to the school council at their upcoming meeting.

At the school council meeting, a history of the process was reviewed, parent participants gave their views on the process (which were extremely positive as they enjoyed tremendously working with staff), and the parents at this meeting were asked to state any concerns they may have had. None were given, other than support, and a final vote was taken to adopt these three items as the school's own. The last step in this process occurred the next day at the staff meeting. Having secured the full support from parents, we pushed for a formal vote amongst staff to adopt the three statements. It was unanimous and the Alexandra Mission Statement, School Values and School Slogan were re-written and, finally, brought into existence.

“We at Alexandra are partners in lifelong learning, dedicated to the challenging and empowering individuals to pursue the future, by experiencing and celebrating success.”

AJHS IS A PLACE WHERE STUDENTS, STAFF, PARENTS, AND THE COMMUNITY ARE COMMITTED TO:

- **a safe, caring, and stimulating environment where high standards of achievement are encouraged**
- **meeting the academic, physical, and emotional needs of all students**
- **a strong discipline policy which encourages accountability for actions**
- **providing a program of academics and complementary courses that meet the challenges of a rapidly changing future**
- **enhancing the development of responsible citizens**
- **promoting individual wellness**

... because students are worth it!

Eagle Butte High School -- The Birth of a Mission for a New School:

The following account will not be as in-depth and detailed as the previous AJHS section. The Eagle Butte process will only be discussed in very general terms. The goal is to provide a broad sense of another school's attempts to develop a mission, which should allow the reader to make comparisons and analyze two very different scenarios.

A unique situation took place in the building of a vision and mission for Eagle Butte High School. A new staff of 14 teachers was being put together for the 1996-97 school year -- of whom only 5 were colleagues from the same school. The principal chose all the teachers who would make up the staff of this brand new high school.

To add to the uniqueness, there was a time constraint placed on the development of a school mission. With recruitment of students becoming an urgent part of the process of getting Eagle Butte High School up and running, it was important that parents and students had a sense of what this new school was going to be all about. Therefore, the newly composed teaching staff needed to define a common purpose for themselves and the school in approximately 5 weeks.

The process began in mid-April. Teachers were given survey information that had been collected by the principal as he attempted to meld a school for all students from a number of distinct attendance areas. Although the survey was not mission specific, it provided important information and was seen as a necessary step of inclusion in the development of a mission that all stake holder

groups could foster and support.

It was the principal's intention that a draft of the school's vision was to be in an advertisable form by mid-May. The resulting process did not allow for parent-student-teacher meetings to take place. Nor would there be time for a lot of entire staff sessions, as staff were being pulled from a wide travel area and were given only one day of release time by their present schools. There were so many other issues to be dealt as well (for example, budget, supplies, timetables, policies, handbooks) that time for mission development was going to be minimal at best. It was deemed by the principal and agreed to by staff that, for now, the mission would be built around staff expectations and ideals, with reference to survey information that had been collected from parents and students on a variety of issues. A small group of volunteer teachers and the principal would lead the charge.

The process went as follows:

April 19, 1996 All staff were given the results of a survey from students and a question sheet to help focus the thinking of staff for the next meeting. This information was to be considered by staff who were to send their reactions and ideas to one teacher (Sam), within a week, for summary and organizational purposes. At the next meeting the greatest portion of the work would need to be completed.

May 1, 1996 - A day of release time was given for all staff from their present schools. Sam led the discussion on developing a vision for Eagle Butte, based on his collecting and summarizing of the information sent to him. During this discussion, a summary of ideas was given, a committee was struck, and a time frame set out for completion of the process.

The collective ideas of the staff were as follows (presented in point form):

Eagle Butte Advantages:

new, smaller, rural setting, family orientated,
strong parental advantage, strong staff, fresh
start for kids, technology, smaller private
school atmosphere, individuality of students,

strong academic focus, marketable satellite
tie-in, Medicine Hat College needs us (e.g.
courses in mechanics during the summer
months and gifted student program), real-life

training, individualized approach, guarantee academic success, health and safety of students, accepting junior high credits, work with students' strengths and interests, personalized, parents and students set policy, friendly atmosphere by our example, working toward a common goal, students are strong

Vision for Eagle Butte:

money will be there to support programs, smoke-free, healthy environment, entrepreneurial high school through business opportunities, sponsor of special projects, student initiative for learning is supported through philosophy, do not lose sight of fundamentals through the business approach,

school for the information age, balanced strong programs, cross-curriculum programming, connect in all fields, critical thinking and awareness, a place where students dare to dream, a place where special moments are planned, modularize work and programs, pilot programs

May 6, 1996 - the volunteer group of staff members met to develop the phrases and wordings of the new Eagle Butte vision and mission. The focus of such efforts was around three major themes:

- A slogan for the school with a defining mission expanding from this slogan
- Advantages that Eagle Butte High School had to offer
- Values/Visions based on the advantages

The principal initiated the step toward a slogan by suggesting the phrase "Giving our students Roots and Wings". His rationale for the statement was that parents wanted a school that would help ground the students in traditional family values (Roots) but as teachers we need to provide skills and abilities that would allow each student to reach their fullest potential and be able to pursue some of their dreams (Wings). There was general acceptance of this idea.

Next, the small group of staff began to forge a mission that tied into the idea of "Roots and Wings". Since it was the principal who gave the rationale for his slogan, he was given the task of polishing the wordings for all of the staff to ratify. At the same time, the rest of the staff focused on the advantages that Eagle Butte could offer. Sam had done some collation of information, based on staff responses, so he presented his suggestions. He had compiled the staff ideas into four advantages: Academic, Technological, Small School, and Community Partnership. The staff developed descriptive phrases that were to go along with each advantage. After many revisions, a draft proposal was ready to go back to staff.

June 03, 1996 - a final, evening meeting was set for all staff to consider the mission and vision statements that had been developed. After some minor semantic adjustments, the Eagle Butte High School Mission and Value Statements were ready for use. They read as follows:

The School's Mission: Giving our students "Roots and Wings".

Students come to us with skills, learning, and values established in their homes, schools, and communities. Eagle Butte seeks to strengthen these "roots" and nurture others that together will lead to our students' personal growth in responsibility, knowledge, skills, creativity, and confidence. All students need these "wings" to reach their full personal potential in a competitive and changing world. All members of our school family will work toward this end.

Our Eagle Butte ADVANTAGES:

The Academic Advantage

We strongly believe in the team approach to education. Students are best served when the school's staff, programs, and curriculum reflect the priorities of involved and thoughtful professionals, parents, and students.

The Technological Advantage

We strongly believe that the mastery of technological skills is a valuable component of every student's education. Students are best served when technology is used to enhance traditional education, and skills are mastered for lifelong purposes.

The Small School Advantage

We strongly believe that students learn best when they belong to a small school family. Students are best served when they feel safe, secure, and supported in a healthy and friendly learning environment.

The Community Partnership Advantage

We strongly believe that education is a cooperative enterprise. Students are best served when they are in partnership with their families, the school, business, and their community.

It should be noted that further expansion of the Advantages were going to take place as time permitted in the first year at Eagle Butte High School. Such work is still proceeding. Some of the results of this work are given in the draft proposal (see Appendix C).

Mission Building -- Speculations & Considerations:

Having participated in two very distinct mission building processes, I feel there a number of aspects of each that are worthy of mention. The following generalizations come to mind:

In a mature school, especially one where the teaching staff has been relatively unchanged for some time, it seems important that the re-defining of a school mission and values be initiated from the "grass roots". If the administration is seen as the primary force behind such a movement, then the teaching staff may consider the activities tedious at best. They are more than likely to resent the initiative and its proponents for encroaching on the limited time they have for considering their own classroom activities.

Moreover, many veteran teachers may have gone through previous mission building processes. Depending on what had happened with those activities, some of the mature educators might envision the whole process as a waste of time. For this same reason, it is important that the drive for a new mission and values come from a core of classroom teachers -- not the administration. The very fact that teacher colleagues may desire a re-definition of the school mission and values should enlist enough support from sceptical staff members to allow the process to unfold. If nothing else, enthusiasm at the teacher level can divert the role of task master away from the administration. An administrator in such a role could promote a meagre effort from resentful teachers.

Developing a mission is a long, time consuming process -- if all of the stake holders in the

school are to have meaningful input. It is important for a central core of teachers to maintain the focus and continue to press forward, setting deadlines for the completion of each step. Without such leadership, the process can become redundant with changes, new ideas and continual dialogue contributing to a never ending cycle. Such a cycle drains enthusiasm and motivation both of which must be nurtured throughout the process. When a school undertakes the task of redefining what it stands for, obviously, there will be different ideas and priorities. Having a teacher as the leader, with a small, committed group of colleagues for support, appear to enhance informal dialogues amongst the stakeholders. As well, an understanding of the commitments and restrictions being placed on other teachers, as they give up time to work on the mission building process, is less easily overlooked. It provides another level of justification and acceptance when deadlines are set and compilation of ideas are made and distributed for verification. Such participation may not be as likely if an administrator is seen as spear heading the task because it is easy to develop a "them-us" type of attitude when an administrator is at the helm and such an attitude is detrimental to any collaborative process.

However, the importance of the administrator's support throughout the process of mission building should not be overlooked. If the school's principal is the educational leader of the building, which that person necessarily should be, then naturally his or her support for all of the activities must be overt and continual. As much as the administrator should probably not be the lead person in the process, he or she must be viewed as totally supportive of the stake holders' desires, efforts, and initiatives. The administrator's input is vital to the success of mission statement development. Such input, however, should be given in a similar manner, and be given similar priority, to all other stake

holders' input, thus re-enforcing the need for other groups and individuals to provide their appropriate share of effort and commitment to the activity.

While the involvement of a core group of teachers seems critical to the completion of a statement of mission and values, the participation of motivated parents seems equally important. All parents need to be given the chance to present their views of how their children should be educated. However, in order for the work to be completed, a few select members from the parent population should probably be given greater opportunities for involvement. Just as having teachers spearhead the process allows for more informal dialogue, acceptance, and understanding to occur amongst their colleagues, so can similar good things occur when parents are seen to be productive members of a mission-building committee. It seems most parents are very accepting of the finished products, even if they did not directly take part in the development of such statements, as long as other parents have taken part. Explanations of and justifications for certain aspects of the statements of mission and values, should they be needed, can come from a member of their own interest group. I think it is sometimes easier to understand why something is the way it is (a mission statement or a set of school values, for example) if your peers are the ones helping you understand.

One of the most beneficial results in the process of building a mission statement and school values, if all stakeholders are included, is that teachers, parents, and students can work collectively toward a common goal. Although the polished mission statement and school values are the final outcomes of the process, the activities and dialogues that take place throughout are usually seen to be most important. In the case of Alexandra, the parents were especially pleased that they were

included and they publicly stated their support for the process. Such formal and informal commitment from the parents went a long way in encouraging the staff of the school. The level of commitment from teachers was raised during the development of the mission statement clearly because of the parental support. Such open favour from the parents increased understanding throughout the community of the dedication and desire of all stakeholders to make Alexandra the best school it can be. Of course, the mission and school value statements are to be the guiding force behind future endeavours but the support and positive public perceptions that were associated with the activities themselves augur well for school efforts in the future. Although the development of the Alexandra Mission Statement took over a year to complete, all of the teachers, reluctant ones and enthusiastic ones, felt good about the process in the end, due in no small part to the positive parental reaction.

Most of the preceding reflections were offered with a mature school in mind. In the case of a new school setting, I believe the critical difference is in the person or group of persons seen as the driving force behind the development of the mission statement. In the new school, Eagle Butte High School, there were no established routines and very few staff members who had worked together for an extended period of time. Moreover, there was no definite collective understanding of what the school would stand for. For this reason, the principal of the school had to be the person spearheading the development of the mission statement. He was the one who linked all of the stakeholders together. He was the single person who had, in the initial planning of the school, held discussions with parents, students, and the eventual staff of the building. For this reason, it seemed he had to be the person in charge of the process. Although it was not his personal dream which

should have become the school's mission statement, it was his personal impressions that caused him to bring a certain staff together, as well as his personal beliefs that were presented as he dialogued with and recruited students (and their parents) to attend the new school. His activities, in a very real way, although not directly focussed toward the development of a mission statement for the school, informally began the process. It seemed inevitable, then, that the principal had to maintain such leadership as stakeholders finally came together to openly define their desires for the school.

With the principal at the helm, that does not mean that other stakeholders cannot lead activities throughout the process. Nor does it mean that this particular principal's desires for the school had to eventually dictate certain outcomes. As with AJHS, all stakeholders had to be assured that their ideas and opinions would be given the same acceptance and consideration as any others. Yet, in this case, and the case of any relatively new school, the initial desires and understandings had to be shaped, to some extent, by the person with the most contact with all parties. I believe the principal was the best person to continue to lead the development of the mission statement as Eagle Butte High came into being.

Having presented and reflected upon two very different processes of mission statement development, I am led to conclude that there is one principle that should be the same for both settings. It deals with the role of the administrator once the mission statement and school values have been defined. Specifically, the administration must pay heed to the collective wisdom of the teachers, parents, and students and ensure that the newly developed, guiding statements are truly the best descriptors of all of the important activities of the school.

In the case of Alexandra, it was important for the administrators of the building to be viewed as a part of but not the force behind the mission development of the school. Once such a process was completed, however, the administration had to take the summarized statements and endeavour to justify, mould, and enhance the future activities of the building around the wishes of its stakeholders. Without the modelling, and real purpose in trying to ensure that the school activities fit within the re-fined mission and values of the school, the entire process could have quickly become one of futility and the seeds of passivity or resistance toward future undertakings for all stake holders might have been sown. Without the best efforts of administrators the mission statement and school values would very quickly become only hollow words.

A teacher alone cannot carry out the role of getting the rest of the staff to align with the newly developed mission of the school, either. It is the administration's primary responsibility to nurture and guide the various participant groups toward alignment with the mission and values. Such a conscious focus toward the mission must be modelled by the teachers and the administration, being apparent in all they do. As the leaders of the school, administrators should show their approval often to ensure continued commitment to important values. They can be responsible for continually encouraging the staff, students and parents to consider their actions with regard to the mission and value statements that have been developed. It is not enough to desire others or tell others to consider the mission and values; the administrators must be viewed as doing so themselves. Their activities, their justifications, and their beliefs for the school must be encased within the newly found confines of the mission and value statements. Covey (1996) may have stated it best:

"Once a vision is shared, how does a leader sustain it? By living it. Himself or herself. No one is above these natural laws or principles... So the boss has to model it, live by it, admit mistakes when the boss doesn't live by it, and then articulate it, be the courageous spokesman of it, let it be the criterion by which all decisions are ultimately made..."

Accordingly, if administrators are to help institutionalize the mission and value statements, their own subsequent practices are as essential as the development of the statements themselves.

Some Concluding Thoughts:

Why would a school and its stake holders undergo such a process?

In the age of Schools as a Business, the Mission Statement becomes essential to the "selling of the school". As we become more competitive in the types of programs we offer, the kind of students we attract, and the eventual outcomes we achieve, educators and schools will need to be very clear about what it is they are trying to pursue. Hence, a clear Mission Statement and School Values will be a guiding force in any attempts to inform the public about what we are doing.

Education and schools can use a boost in public image. Mission Statements are a key component to such an image make-over. There is a common perception, in the "real world", that teachers have it easy. According to some, teachers have very few responsibilities. They provide worksheets, give tests, and take holidays. The development of a strong, well-rounded mission and vision for a school can go a long way to counter such simplistic views of the education profession. Moreover, the Alberta government has mandated that school councils be given an active role in the life of the school. What better way to initiate such a mandate than through the development of a Statement of Mission and School Values. Enlisting all stake holders in a positive and meaningful activity such as this is a pro-active step in gaining support for the "educational world".

If a school works through the development of a mission statement and then "puts it on the shelf", I would be among the first to suggest that such a process was a waste of time and effort.

Upon their completion, the statements of mission and values must be used to enhance ALL aspects of the school. The mission and values become standards for every aspect of the work of the school. If accountability is a requirement in education, the mission and values become the measures against which we can be held accountable. As an educator, I would want to be a part of creating the "tools" by which I will be measured. Even the most reluctant of teachers might feel some motivation if they know that what is being created will become the standards against which their work and their value will be assessed. If that isn't enough to engage their efforts, any complaints of unfair goals should necessarily fall upon unsympathetic ears.

As well, our students are changing. I began teaching seven years ago. The students I see today reflect a different mind set and core values than when I first stepped into the classroom. The school must also reflect such change. The process of mission development provides a unified way to adapt to the "new students" we face. In order to adequately meet the demands placed on educators, we must cooperatively solidify and integrate our practice. Such a collaboration must include the beginning teacher, the veteran teacher, administration, and any one else in between. Reflecting on our practice is key to our improvement. Developing statements of mission and values forces such reflection which, in turn, can improve how we educate and, logically, improve our schools.

There is no sense in trying to fool ourselves. If teachers were left to do as they will, many of us would close our doors and continue in the same, comfortable way we have typically always followed. That approach to education and schooling will not work in our dynamic world of the '90's.

Our goal is to teach students to think critically, to have them reflect on what they encounter, and to assimilate the knowledge they hold into a meaningful package of understanding. This cannot be done in a piece-meal fashion. So it is for schools. We must practice what we preach and model what we expect. If we expect critical thinkers, then we must think critically about ourselves and our schools. If we want our students to become reflective individuals, then teachers must also model a reflective practice. If assimilation of knowledge is an important aspect to education, our schools must present such an assimilated understanding of how they will operate. The first step to beginning such practice in schools can be the development of School Mission Statements and Values.

At the outset of this project, the intention was to describe a detailed attempt by one school to develop a Mission Statement and School Values as part of a school improvement process aimed at unifying the direction for all stake holders within a school. Such detailing of the process was and is by no means a definitive guide for schools. In fact, in contrasting the AJHS process with the Eagle Butte development process, I was able to make explicit some key differences that took place even though both schools were attempting to achieve the same outcome. I must stress one more time that no matter what the specific school situation, a process of meaningful involvement for all stake holders is absolutely essential to success. The Statement of School Mission and School Values must have shared meaning. It cannot be borrowed from another school. I encourage school staffs to take time, make the effort, and work through a series of collaborative ventures to find the unique meaning for your particular school.

Within any organization, there are a range of personalities and characters that get melded into

the dynamic fabric of the place. The need to consider such differences within organizations and between different organizations, only underlies the fact that each school needs to tailor improvement and change activities to their particular participants and setting. I hope this documentation of the Alexandra process and the comparisons made with the Eagle Butte activities, have provided many insights to the reader. From the attempts of others we can learn and improve. I believe, as our world expands and demands continue to increase, such mission building attempts are going to play a vital role in keeping education within boundaries that are manageable and within boundaries that allow us to continue to do what we do best -- TEACH!

In the unsettled, demanding realm of educating adolescents, the process of building statements of common mission and values, can foster a climate in which education can continue to flourish. Directions for success can be clearly mapped out and a course for achievement can be charted. In my experience, the development of a statement of school mission and values became a key component in navigating schools toward success.

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Appendix A - Brainstorming Sheets

GENESIS – THE BEGINNING

Vision Group

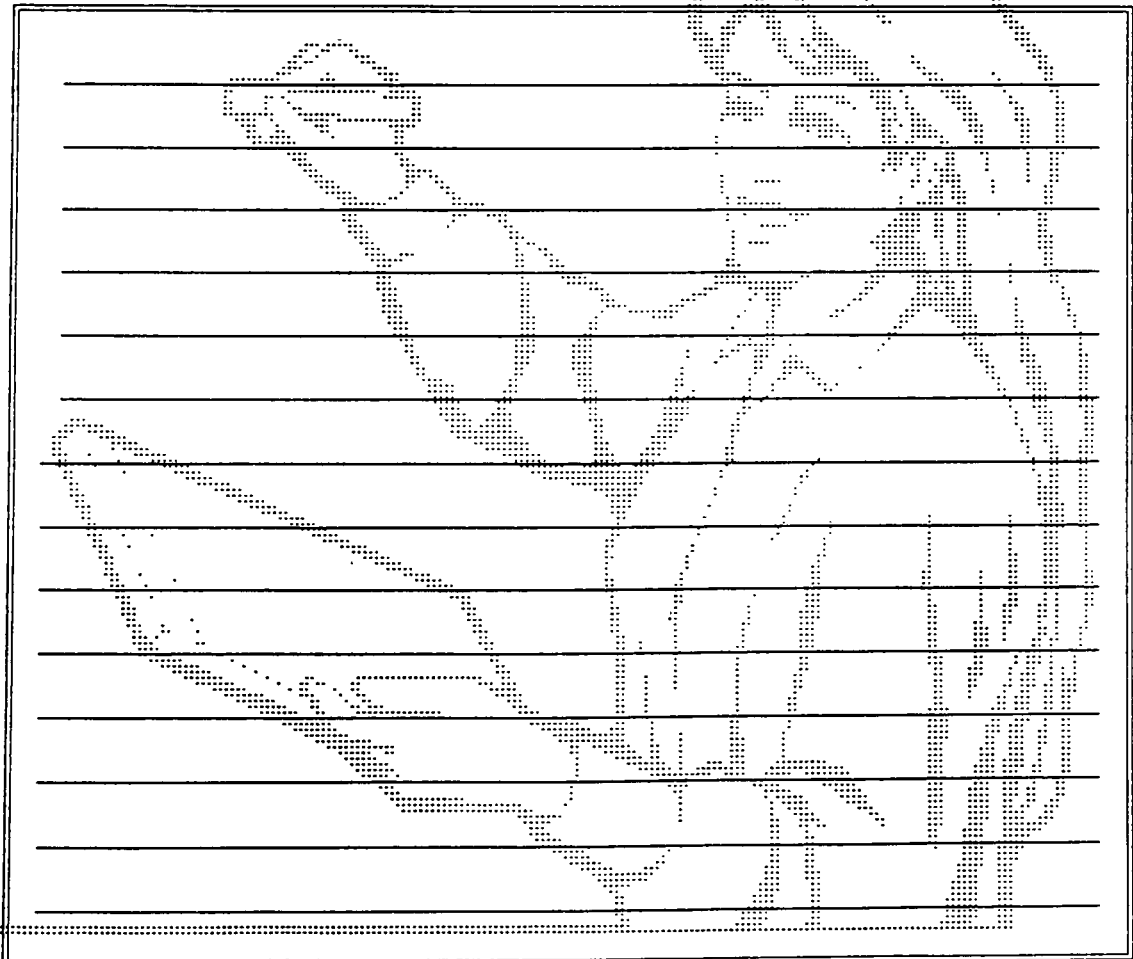
November 8, 1994

Group # _____

Vision Statement:

"What kind of school would you like to work in?"

Group Record:



A large rectangular box containing horizontal lines for writing. The box is outlined with a dotted border. In the background of the box, there is a faint, dotted image of a man and a woman. The man is on the left, wearing a suit and tie, and the woman is on the right, wearing a dress. They appear to be in a professional setting.

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GENESIS – THE BEGINNING

Vision Group -- School Council

November 17, 1994

Vision Statement:

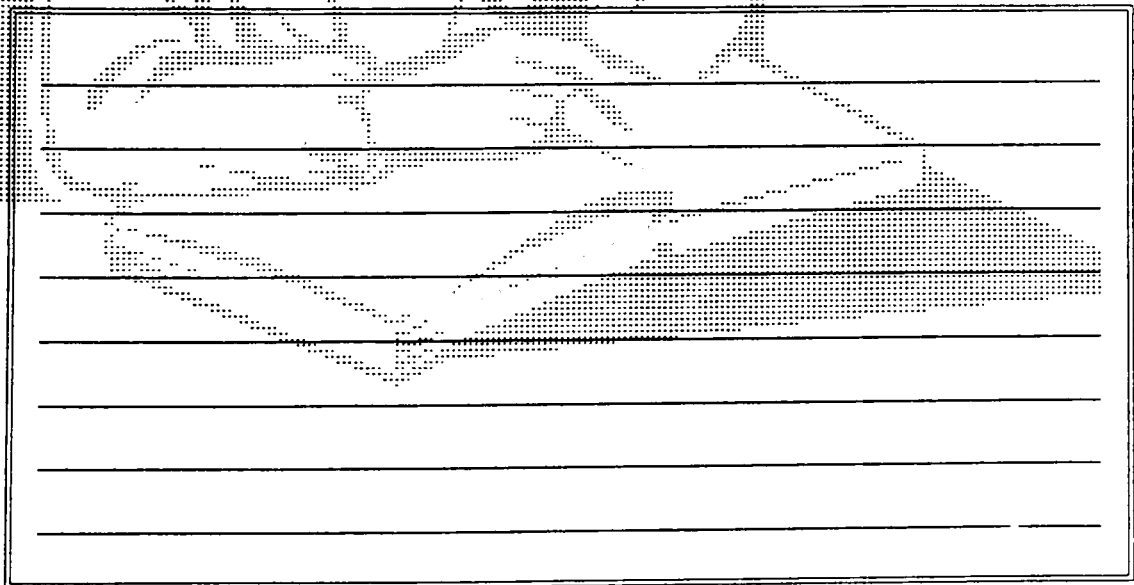
"What kind of school would you like for your child?"

Brain-write:



Brain-write area with seven horizontal lines for writing.

Clarification:



Clarification area with seven horizontal lines for writing.

GENESIS – THE BEGINNING

Vision Group -- School Council

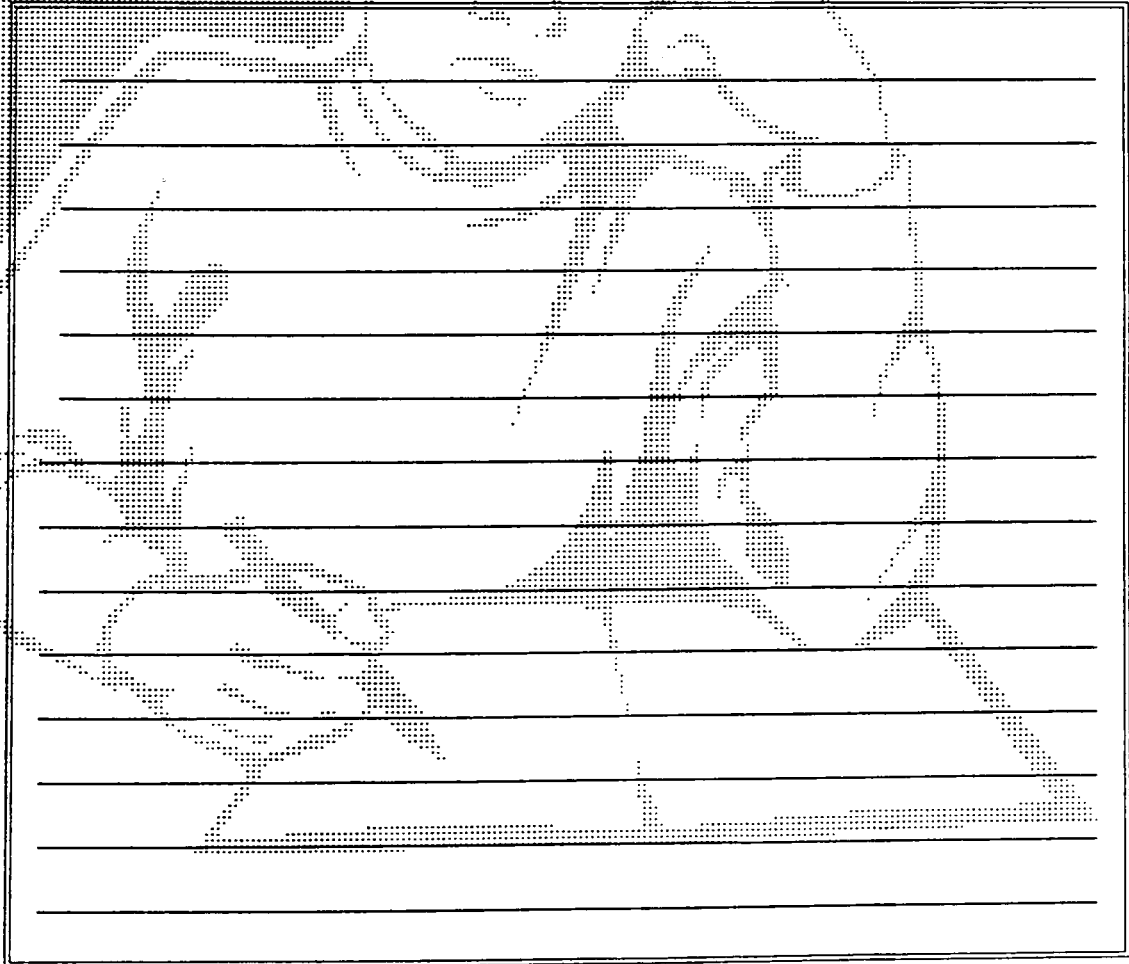
November 17, 1994

Group # _____

Vision Statement:

"What kind of school would you like for your child?"

Group Record:



A large rectangular box with a double-line border, containing 15 horizontal lines for writing. The box is overlaid on a faint, dotted background image of a person's face, which appears to be a child or young person, looking slightly to the right. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the box.

GENESIS – THE BEGINNING

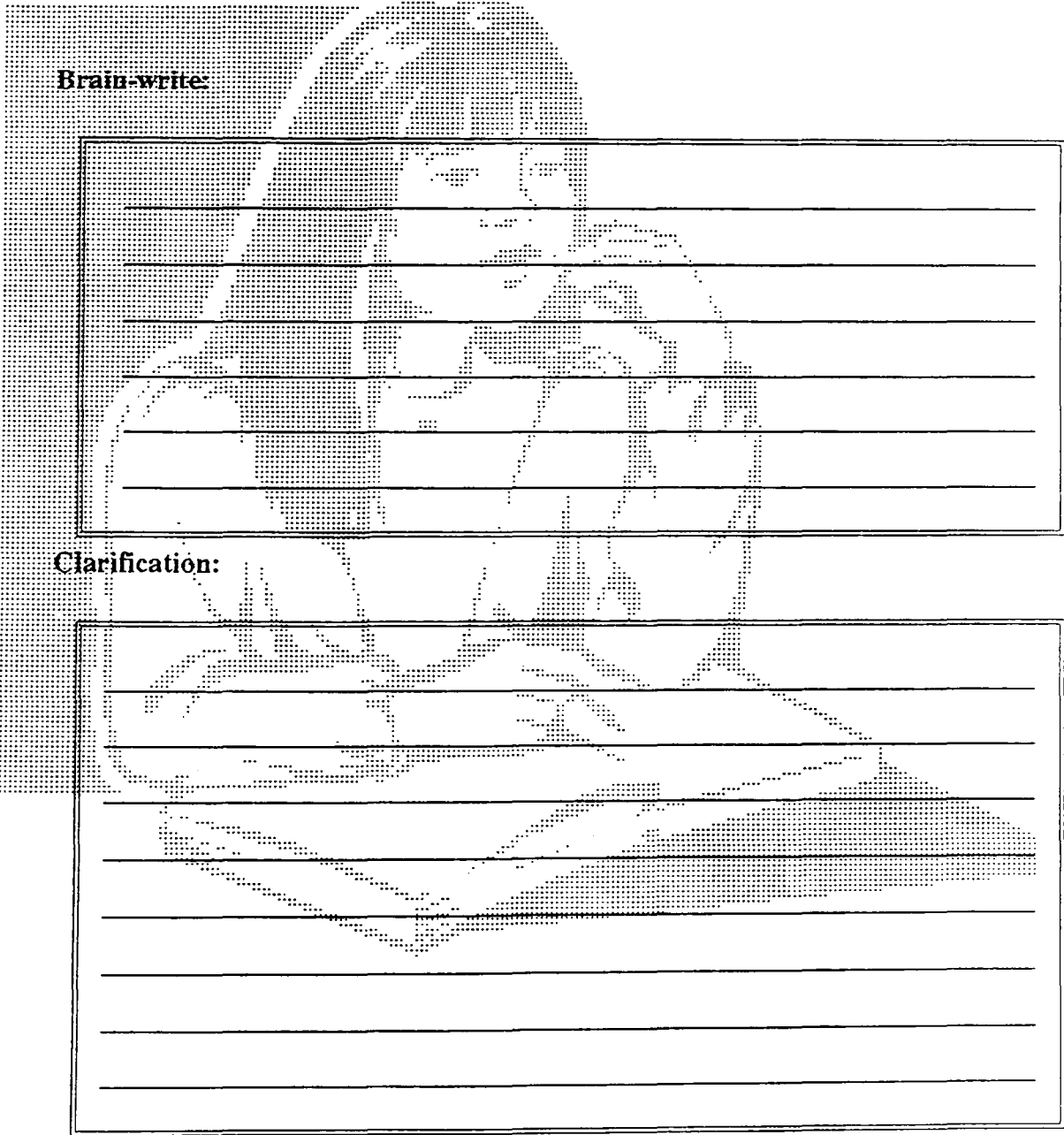
Vision Group -- School Council

December 12, 1994

Vision Statement:

"What kind of school would you like to attend?"

Brain-write:



Clarification:

GENESIS – THE BEGINNING

Vision Group -- School Council

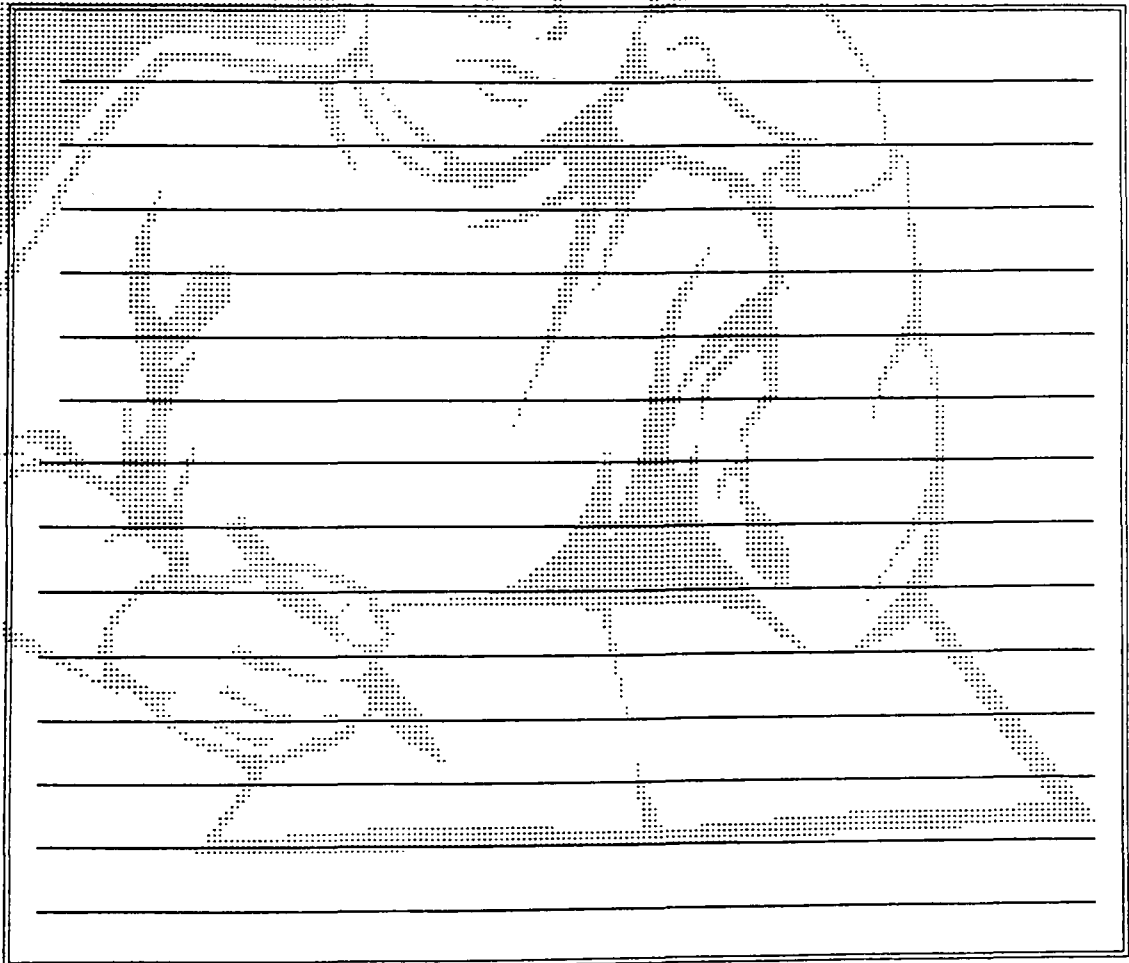
December 12, 1994

Group # _____

Vision Statement:

"What kind of school would you like to attend?"

Group Record:



A large rectangular box with a double-line border, containing 15 horizontal lines for writing. The box is overlaid on a faint, dotted background image of a person's face, which is partially obscured by the lines.

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Appendix B - Evening Agenda Overheads

So, Ms. Input, would you tell me briefly
your methods for teaching values, your
overall philosophy of education, your views
on self-esteem, your ideas on discipline, your
opinions about leadership, the ways you
could excite kids about learning, and how
you would upgrade technology in our school? !!



Alexandra Junior High School Vision Statements

WHAT TYPE OF SCHOOL WOULD WE LIKE AJHS TO BE?

Curriculum/Instruction:

- Options courses/Career and Technology Studies/non-academics should play a significant role in the student's education.
- Stress academics.
- Be flexible to the learning needs of students: academically, physically and emotionally. Encourages growth in leadership and citizenship.

Parents:

Liaison between school and community.

- Parent/groups are encouraged to be more visible in the daily working of school.

Student Schedule:

- To allow for a flexible schedule to accommodate the needs of students and staff.

Discipline:

Well defined disciplining policy with both positive and negative consequences.

Alternative consequences for serious and repeat offenders.

- Discipline policy should be developed with input from all stakeholders.

Students:

Students are encouraged to be responsible and active in their education.

Increased opportunity for student leadership to meet the needs of all types of students.

Students have optimum access to technology that can be provided.

Professional Staff:

Teachers need the opportunity to continue professional growth so they can meet the changes of society.

Resources:

- Stimulating and well equipped environment to meet emotional and academic needs.

Environment:

Teachers provide atmosphere conducive to learning even though the facility needs modernizing.

Establishes positive self-esteem, confidence and wellness.

Encourages communication between parents/students/staff/community.

Encourages involvement in extra-curricular.

Encourages positive attitudes and respect towards our school, community, and each other.

An inviting environment that provides a sense of spirit, motivation, and pride.

- Safe and caring environment for staff and students
- Encourages high standards of achievement.
- Open door policy to the family unit.

Program:

Become a three year school to promote a sense of pride for the A.J.H.S. community

**"AJHS IS A PLACE WHERE
STUDENTS, STAFF, PARENTS, AND
THE COMMUNITY ARE COMMITTED
TO ..."**

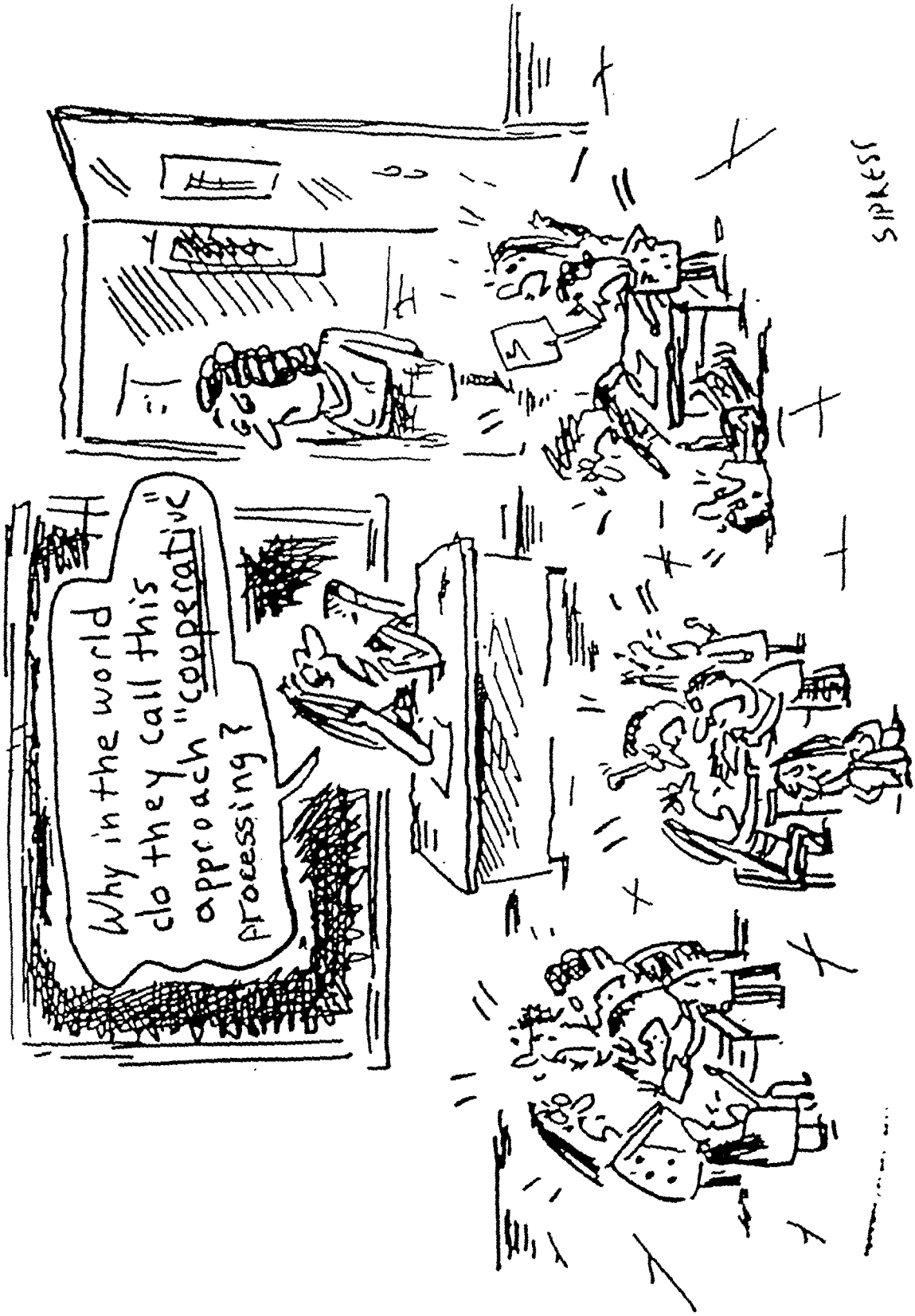
Sample Value Statements

AJHS is a place where students, staff, parents, and the community are committed to:

- a safe, orderly, and structured environment
- striving for personal excellence in all areas
- creating productive and successful citizens
- encouraging responsibility by all parties in the educational process

Cooperative Processing

- **Examine Items for clear understanding**
- **Explanation given by the person who contributed the item**
- **Clarify only. No discussion!**
- **Use in-turn response and pass rule**



SIPKES

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT - MARCH 30, 1995 - 7:00-8:30

EVENING AGENDA

7:00 pm - Parents, Students and Staff gather in
Multi-Purpose Room

7:00-7:15 pm - History of process, summary of the data,
where we are hoping to go with the data
- Examples of Value Statements
- Introduce the statement:

" AJHS IS A PLACE WHERE STUDENTS, STAFF, PARENTS, AND THE
COMMUNITY ARE COMMITTED TO..."

7:15-7:25 pm - Ice Breaker Activity to put participants into
groups
- Groups head to assigned rooms

7:25-7:30 pm - Name chosen for each group
- Facilitator of group explains process for
participants to follow

7:30-8:15 pm - Groups brainstorm ideas that reflect the data that
was collected - in answer to the general statement
above
- record information on chart paper
- provide group members with five GREEN dots and
explain purpose upon return to MPR
- return to MPR and post recorded information

8:15-8:30 pm - circulate MPR and vote on information from all
groups

8:30-9:00 pm - lunch served; the evening is complete

9:00-10:00 pm - interested staff members collate information as
voted upon by the large group

ROOM ASSIGNMENTS/FACILITATOR

Room 112 *Dave Luyten* - **Ball Player**

Room 108 *Dick Brooks* - **Parent Meeting**

Room 106 *Wendy Freeman* - **Snowman**

Room 104 *Shelly Ennis* - **Face**

Room 103 *Linda Davidchuk* - **Man and Child**

Room 102 *Curtis Tye* - **Autumn Scene**

Appendix C - Eagle Butte High School - Draft Proposal

Eagle Butte High School
Creating Confidence in the Future - Together
{Innovate - Challenge - Excel}

As students take ownership of their learning, they are able to take advantage of a broad range of opportunities to develop and experience new skills.

The Academic Advantage

We strongly believe in the team approach to education. Students are best served when the school's staff, programs, and curriculum reflect the priorities of involved and thoughtful professionals, parents, and students.

1. Teachers are dedicated and prepared to assist students achieve personal academic success.
2. Each individual is important and is helped to achieve personal potential.
3. Teachers take an active interest in the dreams and initiatives of the student.
4. Individual initiative and hard work is valued and rewarded.
5. Students, parents, and teachers are fully aware of progress at all times.
6. Teachers cooperate to plan and integrate learning experiences throughout the curriculum.
7. Students reach their full potential when expectations for behaviour and

The Technological Advantage

We strongly believe that the mastery of technological skills is a valuable component of every student's education. Students are best served when technology is used to enhance traditional education, and skills are mastered for lifelong purposes.

1. Students will learn to think critically and evaluate information accessed through technology.
2. The use of technology is a component of every content area.
3. Research initiatives and information processing will be a part of every student's educational experience.
4. Staff members will use technology to track students' academic progress, motivate students, and communicate with parents.

The Small School Advantage

We strongly believe that students learn best when they belong to a small school family. Students are best served when they feel safe, secure, and supported in a healthy and friendly learning environment.

1. Our school is personalized. Everyone has value and everyone has a role to play.
2. All students, parents, and staff have opportunities to become involved in the decision making processes at Eagle Butte High School.
3. Students, parents, and staff clearly define goals that reflect a balance between the needs of a modern education and good, solid family values.
4. Our school nurtures intellectual, physical, emotional, and social growth. We value integrity, responsible citizenship, and community

The Community Partnership Advantage

We strongly believe that education is a cooperative enterprise. Students are best served when they are in partnership with their families, the school, business, and their community.

1. Real life training and learning experiences provide the student with marketable skills.
2. Students build confidence to make decisions, take risks, and accept challenges.
3. Partnerships with the community and business help students realize that what they do in school is relevant to sound citizenship, the world of work, and quality of their personal lives.
4. Community partnerships encourage a positive outlook on students' individual futures.

Eagle Butte High School
Creating Confidence in the Future - Together
{Innovate - Challenge - Excel}

ac achievement are clearly
cc communicated.

Involvement.

5. Students learn to set their own goals, pursue them, and take responsibility for themselves. Learning is a process whereby we take ownership of our choices and accept responsibility for the consequences.

6. All members of the Eagle Butte educational community learn to take responsibility for others.